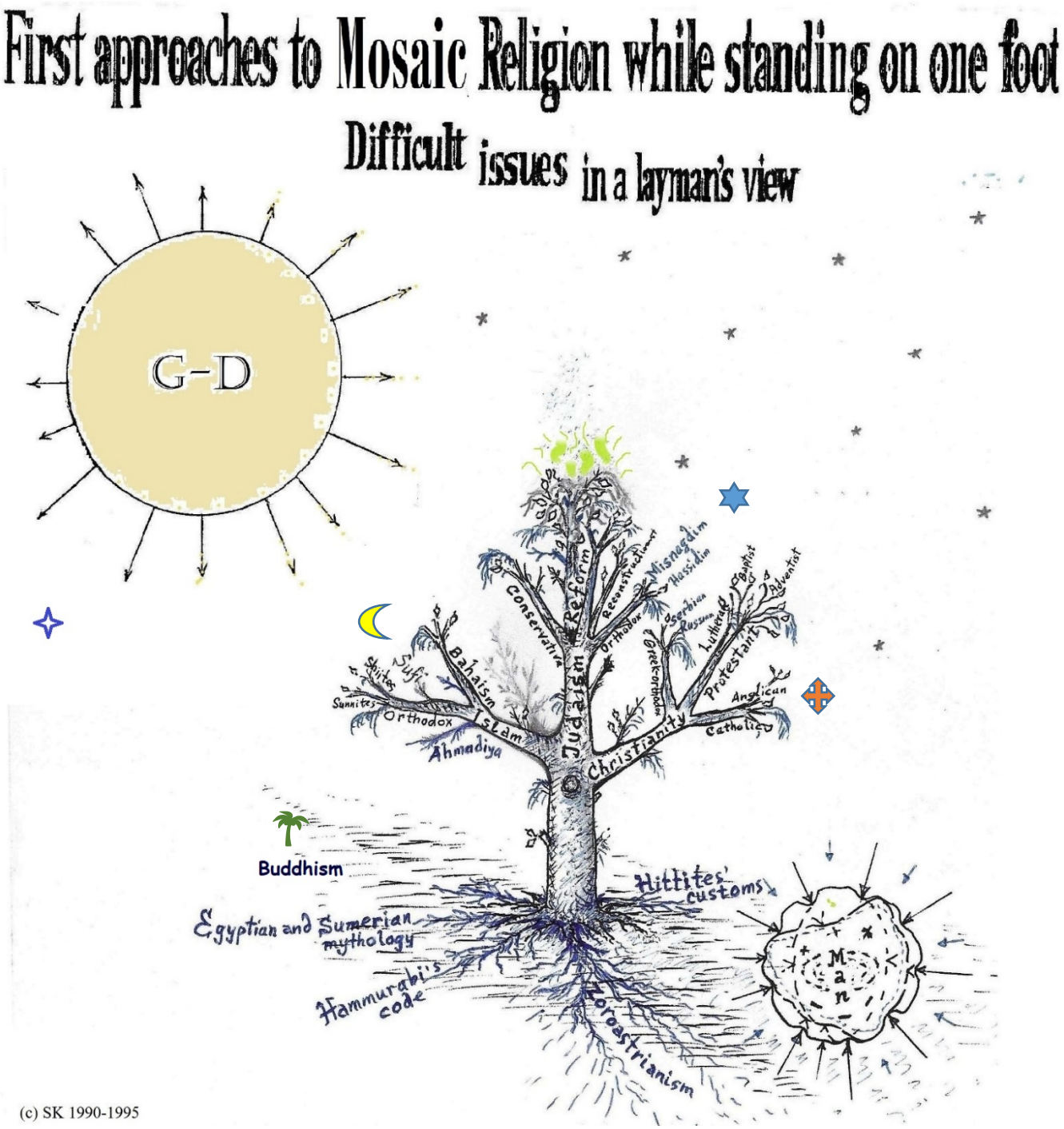
The Guide for the perplexed



Dedicated to my priestly ancestors

Quo Vadis ? Contemplations on religious affairs and practices.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF MOSAIC RELIGIONS

"The thoughts and aspirations of the soul cannot be subject to anyone but God. Therefore, it's absurd and impossible to force someone to believe this way and not otherwise, just by commands..." (*Martin Luther*)

*** * \\\ Are Noahide/ Avraamic/ Mosaic/ Jesuite/ Mohameddan cults relevant today ? What does this paper deal with /// * ***

The author, himself being not a professional researcher, tries here to put fundamental religious questions, as for example:

Can people define and comprehend God ?..
Could the man have been created after God's image ?..
Could God have elected and covenanted with the *sole* nation, does His people include one nationality ?..
If so, did He really love and protect His chosen people from oppression and extermination ?..

Why in real world Good and Evil always go side by side ?...
Does God create and direct world history after a special (wise) Plan ?..
Why doesn't God really care about people ?... Does God support or save people ?...
Does He care about the observant adherents of a particular religions and answer their prayers, wishes and hopes ?..
Is a dialogue between God and the man possible ?.. And between the different religions, or between religious and secular viewpoints ?..
If God created everything, including angels and Satan, both the Good and Evil, then how could a Messiah change what God had done ?..
Can a Messiah/Mashiah/Mahdi save and redeem the whole humankind ?..
.
Should we read and accept the Scriptures literally ? Is the Bible a God-inspired book, or men made ?
Doesn't the border between Paradise and Hell, the divine and the devilish, the holy and the unclean, the forbidden and the permitted, reflect an actual line dividing the man and *the ape* ?..
What is the essential difference between an atheist or polytheist on one hand, and a monotheist on the other hand, if not the border between primitivism, idolatry and a complete, objective worldview ?..
Isn't Christian Anti-Judaism an antithesis to nationalist Judaism ?.. Was Judaism intended exclusively for Jews by birth ?.
Did Promised Land ever exist ? As well as some «holy nation» and a «holy language» ?... Should all Jews study Hebrew/Ivrit and emigrate to Israel/Palestine ?..

Until solving those critical, delicate, alarming issues we cannot make this world a safer, friendlier place suitable for normal human life.
This paper may be a challenge to any Orthodox extremist thinking, but yet a necessary pill for recovery.

As the author believes, both Christians/Gentiles, Judaists, Moslems, whatever sects, should have a *common perspective* on this earth: either to create a sound, reasonable civilization, or to confess pagan cultures, living in an unjust, rotten, chaotic, dangerous world...

* * *

This paper/essay was based on the comparative studies enriched by consultations with religious experts Dr. Steven Jacobs (USA), Zinovy Kogan (Russia), Rev. John Melin (USA), Dr. Jacobus Schoneveld, Dr.Erich Geldbach (Germany), Israel Shamir, Ardeshir Mehta, Yiannis Gavalas and some others.
This work does not pretend for a scholarly research, rather being a sort of student's inquiry and commentaries. Motivation for its writing was simple: to reconsider the Old Biblical Law (Torah) in relation to Christians, to rehabilitate Jesus of Nazareth (Yeshua) before the Jews, and to compare three Avrahamic religions in relation to modern knowledge. I apologize to all the cited authors for not indicating the exact sources due to time deficit.

Shemuel Ben Avraam
1990-1995, Russia

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* * * I) Sermon * * *

Some thoughts about religious survival in our world.
Most people today consider the Scriptures rather as a sort of literary relics or mere a history, not the way of life, they look at the Bible/Torah/Quran as something exotic, invalid, irrelevant, containing foreign concepts not adaptable to modern living. After being neglected by several generations, that is almost lost for the present one.
People say: "We've got enough besides religious affairs- economy, politics, sports, arts, TV etc. What a sense in something unseen, unknowable, idealistic ?.."
How to get people become interested in Biblical/Scriptural truths in the view of scientific and historic experience of the past 250-300 years, how to explain the Scriptures in terms compatible with modern knowledge ? Is there place and time for religion in our materialistic world at all ? Why people ignore it - because of the Orthodox extremes ? What creates the wall in general attitude towards religion - inadequate idioms, obsolete doctrines/laws/rituals/traditions ?..

People say: "We don't need blind belief, show us God's acts, prove us that Divine Will isn't an illusion, give us evidence !"...
Can rational logic embrace that magic, find proper explanation while we are being torn by contradictions between religious and mundane realms, between tradition and experience ?..
Maybe the key is in that we should interpret Scriptures rather in spirit than literally, seeing in them more of symbolic (methaphoric/ allegorical) meaning, treating them as a General Standard, not the end or a purpose in itself ?...
In spite of what Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and the like said, yet religion is one of basic human needs, a kind of a counterbalance to our selfish existence, a powerful instrument of character development.
When F.Nietzsche said that “God was dead”, it meant that an old type, *traditional* idea of God (theology) died long ago. It were those obsolete irrelevant religious practices which Freud called “a collective neurosis”, though they are not more schizophrenic than a secular self-indulgent mass culture which cultivates the worst in a man, “the culture of death” (John Paul II) and is the real people's opium...

Of course, the immediate "objective" effects of a religious way of life are not always apparent or demonstrated, and yet, let's try to figure it out...

Aiming at God, we approach our inner self which is obscure to many of us. "True worship is not a petition to God, it's a sermon to our own selves" (E.Hirsch). "We pray for what we want to become - not what we want to be given" (rabbi H.S.Kushner).

Concentrating on the Divine, on something greater than we average humans are, we aim at becoming holier, less self-centered, more just and merciful, more responsible, wise and creative - "after His likeness"...
God is a protection against deification and idolatry of any kind. He helps us not to depend on other people, nor to be a slave of things, and to see life's dynamics and perspectives. When we oppose idolatry, we become integral and more objective.

To fear God means - be sensitive/ receptive to the world, Nature, to the WHOLE of reality, to all aspects of life, and to be aware of consequences of evil/wrong-doing, cultivate conscience and self-discipline...
Speaking in another way, our love for God means reverence to Life. "Belief in God is a basis for taking life seriously" (rabbi H.S.Kushner).
Praying to some abstract Entity, fulfilling the commandments, we are forming ourselves, we establish control over our lower nature, instincts, preventing moral and intellectual decay/ruin. To be holy means to keep one's sub-consciousness clean.

Regardless of its sphere of influence, prayer has its positive effects. As yogis say, "thought is a greatest power on earth". It's a kind of spiritual re-charging, self -mobilization, if not mental training...

When we commit ourselves to some Higher/ Superior being, when we believe in Divine Cosmic Order/Plan, we gain inner balance (peace), optimism against worldly troubles, misery, evil luck, "grave alarms", we find huge hidden Resource of strength, tranquility and love, the inner Force supporting us, new insights guiding us, we see the Whole behind the particular...
"God gives men the power to overcome tragedy and find reasons for going on with life" (H.S.Kushner).
All that isn't a fiction, mysticism, nor an "opium".
In other words, God means intrepidness and striving for perfection...

Sciences and technology aren't concerned about meaning of life, one's destiny or eternal values. Science can't give us hope or motivation for self-perfection/ improvement, nor protect us from degradation...
It is inner faith that helps to survive in our cruel, mad world (if it is faith - not mere illusion). What true religion may teach us first of all, is that our Spirit is superior to animal instincts, our mind superior to chaos...
Religious way of life improves our attitudes and habits, to some extent protects our families, sustains our psychic and physical immunity, leads us to a worthier/ deserving human life.
So let's "come into the refuge of the Everlasting Arms..."

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* * * II) CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONSHIPS IN A MODERN ERA * * *

One of the components of the new menschliche Gesellschaft is a proper religious education adequate to the modern world.
For centuries the religions have been dividing people by various taboos and prescriptions, causing tensions and conflicts between the groups, sects and countries.
Today, having got a long historical, social and scientific experience, we need both new Christianity and renewed Judaism – both devoid of mythology, dogmas and anachronisms, revised, refined, reformed, reconstructed, alive, creative, evolving...

'The reason for seeking a new approach to traditional religions, for the radical changes in theology on both parts, is a hope that, in spite of their present sad state, the religions may be somehow revitalized and serve society *in a due way*...

Sharing the benefits and advantages of each one, understanding one another, overcoming the archaic dogmas, learning from each other, - we might "prepare the way for the Lord"...
Both Christianity and Judaism have a right for existence, for their own specific idioms, rituals and liturgies, their own interpretations - as a manifestation of variety of God's Word and Revelation. Both may pretend for realization of their ideas/concepts, and both are subjected to delusions and failures. We have common background, heritage, traditions, one and the same God, same Scripture (expanded by apocrypha, by various footnotes, commentaries, interpretations), we have common values, priorities and goals. Both religions developed simultaneously, influencing one another.

Today it's not so essential, for whom do we regard/take Jesus of Nazareth (Yeshu ha-Notzri), what do we see in him, Gottessohn or Menschensohn, - as what he taught...
Let's consider if, in our enlightened, overcomplicated, interconnected, interdependent world, the religious/theological distinctions really have any practical sense at all, and isn't it the high time to transcend them all ?... More important than theological arguments and liturgical distinctions is to "love truth and peace, love people and bring them nearer to the Torah (das Gesetz)" /Zech. 8:19; Talmud, Avot 1:12/...

To survive in the modern world, we need more tolerant, inclusive (not exclusive) culture, we should stress the major, universal issues and values of different religions, not the particularities creating the wrong stereotypes and separating us from "the untrue/unfaithful" believers. We should avoid idolization/idolizing and idealization of our own faiths, doctrines, rituals, liturgies, confessions, or nations...

Christians and Jews were both equally elected by Herr Gott. We may criticize one another, and are of one human family, both belong to the same Judeo-Christian culture once built on the ancient Greek-Jewish basis.
The most important, both could well combine the values of each other, being a mutual complement of each other. Moreover, we should not limit ourselves just to sole Biblical/Mosaic tradition alone...

It’s symbolic that an Old/Jewish Testament (Tanakh) and a New/Jewish-Greek Testament, both became in Europe one indivisible Scripture which reflects God's Covenant with both parties - Israel and Gentiles. The two Testaments are valid if we treat them properly, reasonably, without fanaticism...

The Orthodox and fundamentalists *on both sides* create the big walls dividing us, they hinder our mutual reconciliation and convergence towards one another, being afraid of re-evaluation of their rigid, primitive, obsolete concepts and creeds...
Many problems do arise when some ideology (political/party or religious) solely reigns in society, dominating the state policy, when Orthodoxy, fanaticism, the extremes win over rationality and commoп sense.
Political, national and religious extremism is an obvious evil. In this respect, separation of religion from the state is necessary: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" - to avoid ideological dictate and for the sake of objectivity.

Some day both Christians and Jews may come to realize that, in essence, we've got one and the same, allgemeine Biblical religion (differently interpreted and understood), so both ought to serve the same cause.

Let's remember what Rabbi Harri-Hans Hirschberg said, a native of Berlin (ordained by Leo Baeck): "Judaism and Christianity need each other in the ways of a check-and-balance system. The faith of a Western man is Judaism balanced by Christianity, and Christianity checked by Judaism..."
To be a Christian means in a sense to be a Jews’ heir, ideological successor...

[This paper was delivered to the international conference “*Remembering for the Future*” in Berlin, 1994]

* * * Reform approach to Torah: Judaic perspective * * *

Decades of atheistic propaganda, totalitarian regimes, spread of mass-culture, general degradation of population, deterioration of living conditions have led to complete neglect of religious education. Today the majority of people is quite suspicious about dogmatic religious outlook concerning irrational beliefs which became inadequate, incomplete, one-sided in the modern world. The concepts of Divine Will, of World-to-come (Afterlife, see Math.8:22; 22:32; Psalm 6:6), Resurrection of the dead, Mashiah coming, some Kabbalistic doctrines of Emanations etc., mysticism (Ben Sirah 3:21-24), the meaning of sacrifice, miracles, as well as many rituals, routine prayers and benedictions are met with much indifference by the majority. People prefer Yoga system instead, claiming it to be more practical and understandable, or Buddhism, Chinese practices etc.

It's evident that every congregation should possess authority to have her own approach to Halakha (Jewish Law), to institute necessary enactments (Takkanot) on problematic laws and practices, to introduce/evolve appropriate customs, to compose acceptable prayer-books, etc., depending on local culture, environment and economical possibilities of the members. "In all cases, be they questions of ritual or principle, individuals and groups must decide for themselves about the proper way to proceed in a given situation" (rabbis R.Alpert and J.Staub).

After all, none is authorized to proclaim final, absolute Truth. And, it seems, many ancient rabbis showed flexibility (not uniformity) interpreting Jewish Law and the Torah, accepting variety of opinions, allowing some freedom in fulfilment of commandments (Mitzvot),

Since many religious doctrines aren't proved logically, we have just to study, inquire, seek Truth that has many facets. We shouldn't make theological assertions and speculations. In terms of Jiddu Krishnamurti, we should try to see WHAT IS, as it is**,** exploring, not conforming...

For sure, Judaism must be reformed according to demands of modern life, in many areas:

1) defining one's nationality: we consider it possible to set the double nationality, either by one's mother or by father (patrilineal descent), as was practiced before common era: both influence an individual genetically; if Orthodox rabbis claim that a Jew deliberately converted into Christianity, Islam or another religion, is no more counted as a Jew, then the main factor defining one's identity is not one's mother's nationality (as practiced in the ancient Rome) but one's beliefs and culture...

2) we believe that Giyur (conversion) could be effected without Brit-milah (circumcision), Mikvah (ritual bath) and enough knowledge of Hebrew, - it was known as a conversion by conviction or by choice; neither Avraham, Yitzhak, Jakov, nor Moshe were subjected to, nor established/instituted any special ritual of religious conversion... [Avraam, Yitzhak, Yakov, Joseph and Moshe hardly knew Ivrit; Babylonian Talmud was written in Aramaic; besides both Patriarchs and their wives were hardly "Jewish", rather Chaldean...]

Remember how rabbi Hillel converted a heathen ("standing on one leg"). Remember what a Midrash says: "Who is a Jew ? - He who testifies against the idols". According to rabbi Yehoshua (or Eliezer), one is a proselite, even if he performed only a Mikvah... Describing a conversion to Judaism, Philo only mentioned that the proselyte must deny the gods of Gentiles and believe in One true God, also adopt the Jewish way of life. After all, a man is that what he thinks of himself, what he is willing to be (see Yevamot 47a), what he does, how he behaves, what is his culture... David Ben-Gurion defined a Jew as "anyone who considers himself such"...

3) We don't object to inter-marriages in our complex world, provided there's mutual understanding and respect, we are not against *beneficial* physical assimilation, but we are against "metaphysical racism".

God never objected to mixing Jews with Gentiles [Babyl.Talm, Megila 96], true religion is not national, God gave us brains to choose. All depends on WHOM do we marry, proper selection is useful and desirable.

4) we believe in legalization of certain reasonable emendations in Tanah (Bible) and the Talmud in accordance with historic, scientific and cultural experience of world civilizations over new era; otherwise Scriptures become merely a literary relics, a collection of legends and poetry not applicable to actual life of to-day,

5) we don't consider Judaism as purely ethnic/national religion.

"Sinai is not a closed book. Torah lives in dialogue with the world. All the wisdom of the world was not found in Sinai... The Haredim say: "Everything is in the Torah, we have nothing to learn from the world; we

don't value the world, it has nothing to offer us, we don't have to rethink our position on Torah because of what Kant wrote or Freud; what do the goyim have to teach us?"...

And yet Judaism should be the foundation from which Jews can absorb the best values of the world and learn from them, without losing their particularity..." (rabbi David Hartman);

6) we cannot accept the separation/segregation of men and women in the synagogue, as the practice introduced in the Middle ages (since the 13th century), as well as specific attitude towards woman;

7) we are sure of continuity of the Diaspora (according to the Talmud, God gave Israel a privilege to be dispersed among the nations [Pesachim 87], teaching them a Torah, carrying certain ideals, not avoiding/ignoring others, nor claiming (pretending for) superiority or exclusivity. Ingathering of all Israel in one artificial reservation, big ghetto, is an utopia, or just an allegory meaning reconciliation with God (Teshuva) and spiritual community, unity of people on a common religio-cultural basis...

Only 25 % of the world Jewry live in Israel. As Max Dimont put it, it was a Diaspora which saved Jewish culture, and Diaspora remains universal soul of Jewry necessary for Jewish survival.

“Judaism is more tied to Time than to the land. Holiness of Time, of Shabbat, is more important than holiness of the land” (Ernst Simon)...

8) We agree that Jewish/Judaic tradition must undergo change and development. As rabbi J.Rayner put it, "we seek from it guidance rather than governance". Torah is a plan, a guide-line, not a party/army statute dictating man's behavior. Torah is a music scores without an orchestra, it cannot embrace/ encompass and foresee the Whole of life/truth, God's wisdom... "The commandments put a man in the right path only in a general way, they are unable to provide for subtle and new problems which constantly require the guidance of morality and ethics" (rabbi M.S.Meiri)...
"The authority of the Scriptures is only presumptive, not conclusive" (J.Rayner). Halakha and tradition have a vote, but not a casting vote or veto. They are "the starting point, not our automatic end-point; our guide - not a Procrustean bed" (rabbi C.Eimer). "Halakha is merely the way, not the ultimate goal/purpose" (D.Prager, J.Telushkin).
"In the excessive authority of the Word, the Law, the Symbol is the danger of idolatry to Judaism" (T.Frymer-Kensky).

Torah is not in heaven (Deut. 30:l2), it does not exist without a man and his environment. So, in terms of Arthur Waskow, we draw on the ancient traditions, but are not restricted by them.

In new conditions we need new approach, and the critical viewpoint stimulates searching...

"True religion never asks us to turn off our moral judgement and critical intelligence. It is a religious obligation to use our God-given intelligence to discover the truth" (rabbi H.S.Kushner). God cannot be against our analytical reading of the Scriptures and rethinking/reconsidering a given theology.

Judaism should make sense for people. Today we need to determine what the Scriptures mean for a modern society, to re-interpret them reasonably, combining a tradition with rationality.

"Because our environment differs from our ancestors’, we must transform their beliefs and practices into a contemporary idiom" (R.Alpert and J.Staub).

Many people have problem in understanding of traditional religious terms. Contrary to archaic concept of Yahweh meaning the **pagan tribal totem god**, many treat God-concept as a natural Cosmic Creative Force, the Source of Life, others- as Energy-Information-Field inherent (immanent) in every object of Universe, or as the Whole-of-Reality, "All of Being", [YHWH means "One Who brings into being (creates) and maintains/sustains all that is" - see Jer.51:19]; some understand God as a human conscience, or Wisdom, or Righteousness, the symbol of Perfection, Harmony, etc.

For somebody God means a state of mind devoid of any deification and idolization - freedom (or protection) from Idolatry and Mythology...

In the non-orthodox view, "God is that aspect of reality which elicits from us the best that is in us and enables us to bear the worst that can befall us... Obedience to God's Will means the power to conform to the **basic law of life**. Obedience to that law brings salvation, defiance of it leads to disaster..."

(Mordechai M.Kaplan) [see Psalm 27:5; Ezek.33:15]

For us to-day to “fear God” is to adhere to the best Natural and human laws. To comprehend God means the ability to attune oneself to Universal Symphony, to think and act adequately to Reality, to reject idolatry

[cult/ fetish/ illusion-making] of any kind: worshipping or deifying Nobody and Nothing; to see the Whole behind a particular, to see man's life in a broader context, and things in a perspective {to put it another way, to see things in context of the Whole Life}; to be fair and responsible, and ready for any turns of living...

After all, “to know God is to know what one must do” (E.Levinas), how to live, to cope with life...

Positive religion is incompatible with any sort of otherworldly mysticism. For the many, religious practices (prayers, benedictions, rituals, etc.) are a kind of psychotherapy, psychological rehabilitation, or a spiritual training.
Some value Torah as a moral code of conduct, as philosophy of self-protection, promoting self-discipline, communion of people and social support, improving human relationships.
The worse problem arises with unexplainable, irrational commandments (hukim): without any reasonable explanation of their meaning people never take them seriously...

What we are sure about, until the balance between the doctrinal Torah and actual living isn't established, until we in our generation haven't re-interpreted and corrected mythological and archaic texts and laws, unless we combine tradition and creativity, faith and reason, the coming generations may lose the Torah at all.

Let's remember, "When the Holy One gave the Torah to Israel, He gave it in the form of raw wheat and flax, so that we might make it into flour and clothing..." (Midrash, Seder Eliyahu Zuta).

"If a person has no capacity for insight and for reasoning on his own, and for adding to what he has received from the tradition, he can have no knowledge..." (Mahzor Vitry)

It's a simplification to accuse Haskalah and religious liberals of destroying the traditional Judaism. If the majority of Am-Israel, both in Eretz and in diaspora, doesn't observe Halakha and many biblical Mitzvot (tefilin, ear-locks, mikvah, kashrut, teruma, maaser, khalah, orlah, yovel and shemita years, omer counting, Tu-bi-Shevat, fasts, formalized prayer and brahot, oriental head-covering indoors and any season [tradition since the Middle ages],- if all that isn't in use for over 200 years, invalid anymore, if many Mitzvot based on local customs, aren't universal, - then why are we afraid of proper changes ?... "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions" (Mark 7:9).
Moreover, we should **live by laws, not die from them**...

"So much for the myth that our great-grandparents were much more observant than we are today. The ultra-orthodox, "meshugge frumm", were never the norm, ever only a mini-minority" (rabbi W.Wolf). And "the majority of Jewish population lacked the time and education to implement the noble ideas of the religious elite. They were more interested in ensuring good health and good harvests than in communion with God or constant meditation on the words of the Torah" (Prof. Shaye J.Cohen).

Torah was formulated over 2000 years ago and since then constantly changed in the course of history. “It's inaccurate to claim that the rituals and beliefs of contemporary orthodox Jews date back to Sinai” (R.Alpert and J Staub) ."Jewish life has evolved, it always adapted itself to the needs of the time. Jews in ancient Israel required one type of law, in exile they developed a way of life suitable to the new circumstances" (rabbi Ira Eisenstein).

We believe, God (as they imagined Him) might give hints to people, century after century:

- I don't need the Sumero-Babylonian myths of world’s and man's creation, or Gan Eden;
I never told Avraham to split the sacred animals, or to bring Itzhak for offering;
neither have I ordered extermination of the Canaanites;
nor did I perform supernatural miracles...

- I need no temple sacrifices, your heifers, pigeons, goats and roosters (Isaya 1:11,12; 66:3), your prejudice of the first-borns; I never established your scrupulous Shabbat vetoes (making the cult out of Saturday), your morbid ceremonials and observances (Hametz, Pidyon ha-Ben, fantastic rules like Eruvin etc.), your Gimatrias (occultism), and your attitude to women is not mine... [“Shabbat belongs to you, not you to Shabbat”- Talmud]...

- I never chose/elected holy/sacred nations; I appreciate and treat people by their deserts, not by merits of their ancestors or mere national belonging...
I don’t divide Jews and Goyim: religion, the law, society, the state, life on this earth are common/ universal concern of all nations, none has special selective monopoly or the right for Diktat...

- I don't need the external, conditional attributes: circumcision, your Mesopotamian beards,

your medieval fur-hats and yarmulkas/kipot, tefilin, tallit, your amulet Mezuzah, your inventions like shaatnaz, kapparah, lulav, sukkah, etc.
"Humans look on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart" (I Sam.16:7)...

Stop worshipping the dead forms. Remember Hos.6:6; Prov.21:3; Mic. 6:6-8; Isay.1:11-17; 58:6-10; Am.4:4-6; 5:21-24; Math.23:23; Zech.7:5, 6

Any cult is idolatry. Who goes against the laws of life, goes against Me...

- I need your repentance and good deeds, your sound mind, pure heart, skilful and helpful hands, your knowledge, and wise conduct - all that creates man's destiny...

- Remember, Israel, the essence of the Law:
1. realize **Cosmic unity** of all Creations, community of Life...
2. don't hurt your neighbor, remain human amid animals...
3. dignity and integrity of an individual are of supreme value...
4. revere and preserve Life (and health) which is sacred...
5. struggle for Justice...

All the rest commandments may vary depending on conditions and circumstances.

Here let's think what was the advantage of Christianity, the sister-religion of Judaism, that widely spread not only by sword and fire. Initially Christianity proved to be successful because of its simplicity and openness, care for everyone, not exclusively for certain group, sect, nationality, party, denomination, since the rabbi Jeshu ha-Notzri dreamed to make Judaism popular and universal: he extended “God's covenant with Israel” and the Torah to Gentiles (though some scholars argue that it was Paul who first spoke against national narrow religion [Ephes.2:14; Rom.2:11; 10:12], he had a global vision not restricted by the cumbersome, degrading Halakhah, by old dogmas and customs, he rejected the priestly authority (professional clergy) and the cult of the Temple...

As Talmud states, "Jerusalem was destroyed because people did not act *beyond* the strict requirement of the Law”(Bava Metzia,30-b). Jesus liberated Jewish existence not from the law itself, but from turning the law (Torah) into the shackles, the mental yoke.

As rabbi Menachem Mendl Kotzker put it, "Mitzvah turns into **idol** for worship, if people forget that a Mitzvah is merely the way towards God and the Good"...

Jesus made accent on spirit, not rituals. Apostle Paul (former rabbi Shaul) wrote to Romans (2:28): "One is a true Jew not by his appearance, but who is such inwardly. True circumcision is not literal - on flesh, but which is in one's heart, in spirit..." (see Deut.10:16; John 4:23-24; I Cor.7:19; Jer.31:33).
Jesus (Yeshua) and his apostles aimed at adapting Judaic tradition to beneficial aspects of Hellenistic culture (useful combination of traditions).

So as "capitalism" and "socialism" came to convergence, Jews and Christians may recognize, through dialogue, the common spiritual background and heritage. Synagogue reformers and church protestants might come to terms, especially if the true status and mission of Jesus could be reconsidered - as a saint, Tzaddik, a Guide, prophet, a first Reform rabbi who negated mediation and usurped authority of priesthood and Orthodox rabbinate.

Many Christians are not aware of the fact that they adopted and use not an "Old", but Jewish Testament - the basis of the New Testament.

"Israel (Judentum) ist die Wurzel der Christenheit" (Martin Stoehr). And many Jews don't realize that New Testament was an innovatory product of Jewish culture of particular historic period.

"Christianity began its life on earth within Israel, the Jewish people, as a **new interpretation of Judaism** [“eine innerjudische Reformbewegung”(W.Salberg)], and for a long time remained a kind of Judaism” (Jacob Neusner) [*export-brand Judaism*].

“Christianity and Judaism are both confessions of Israel” (L.Ragaz).

Over 2000 years Jews lived amid many cultures and communicated in languages of their residence: Persian, Babylonian, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Spanish, German, Polish, Russian, English, etc., using Hebrew (*Ivrit*) just for the purpose of worship [*Ivrit* was a spoken language not more than 500 - 700 years through]. Jews did not isolate themselves from the neighboring traditions and customs, following the principle “**the law of your country is the law**” (Talmud, Gittin 10; Jerem.29:7)- wherever they live...

Hebrew alphabet was similar to Aramaic [both derive from the Phoenician script]; *Ivrit* has common roots with Babylonian; Hebrew calendar derived from the Sumerian and Babylonian calendars. Yiddish language was used by Jewry over the past 700-800 years through.

Jewish religious music borrowed, adopted and adapted many non-Jewish melodies of surrounding cultures (magazine “Moment” # 19/4-94). Some scholars claim that a *Huppah*- a marriage canopy was first used for Church ritual in the Middle Ages [this props still remains in practice of Roman Catholic church], on the other hand, *Hupa* and *tales* could be borrowed from India (many obvious similarities);

the glass smashing at the marriage ceremony was a local custom in Medieval Germany [differently interpreted]...

In this view, Jews may not reject European traditional New Year tree as a symbol of the biblical Tree of Life, without reference to Santa Klaus or Christmas...

Cultural “cross-fertilization has always occurred and revitalized Judaism in each epoch” (Theological essay, Journal “Manna” IV-90).

In a course of over 2000 years Jewry more or less integrated into European community, while in the Middle East they dwelt through some 500-700 years prior to dispersion.

Exploring both sister-religions, we may come to conviction that Jews and Christians still have more in common than the different, their cultures mutually complement each other, "both need each other in the ways of a check-and-balance system" (rabbi H.H.Hirschberg).

"May the beauty of Japhet [the Greeks] dwell in the tents of Shem [the Jews]" (Talmud B., Megila 96).

After all our sad history, the best approach is not separate but cooperate. “Vor Gott sind die beiden, Jude und Christ, Arbeiter am gleichen Werk, Er kann keinen entbehren” (F.Rosenzweig).

"Die judische Religion ist die Wurzelreligion sowohl fur die Christen, wie auch fur den Islam" (J. B. Metz).

God is One, Truth is one**,** Nature is one, the world, Reality is one, the law is one...

When we exchange our views and ideas, share experience, out of that exchange something new may appear - new vision, new understanding; then we may come to a renewed, refined, more tolerant, non-racist, creative, “user-friendly” religions - not limited to some narrow, ossified, petrified dogmas...

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III) **Short note on circumcision:**

"The Bible nowhere regards circumcision (Brit-milah) as the essential mark of Jewish identity or as the *sine qua non* for membership in Jewish polity" (Shaye J. Cohen). Besides being a remnant of a sacrificial cult, symbolic rudiment of human sacrifices (Spencer), "circumcision has no proven medical benefit. According to statistics, circumcised people are more susceptible to chlamydia. Surgical removal of body parts is justified only when disease is present and other treatments have failed. Does anyone have the right to cut off a normal, healthy, functioning body part of another human being ?" (R.F. Goldman). Incision/ cutting of body parts is a cruel psychological trauma for a person of any age. Cutting a living flesh is violation of a Noahide Covenant !

"The belief that not circumcising infants will weaken Judaism, underestimates our ideals and purpose. Judaism will be much stronger without circumcision" (Journal "Moment" 3/17.92). The Bible prescribes not to make incisions on one's body, nor to lay open one's flesh, and to avoid pain and hurt.

Could God require blood drawing as a covenant with man ? - Then can piercing of one's ears or nose represent man’s “connectedness to God” ?...

Brit-milah is not a “genuine, uniquely Jewish” symbol, since it was practiced for long by Egyptians, Mesopotamians, African tribes and Moslems...

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CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE: IS THERE A CHANCE FOR SURVIVAL ?
SOME TYPICAL THEOLOGICAL TOPICS for DISCUSSION.

* * * POSSIBILITY of REVISIONIST APPROACH to RELIGION in the view of general crisis of churches and other denominations * * *

1) Let's first begin with hard issues of Christianity that need to be solved. Some aspects and doctrines of the Christianity seem now-a-days for people to be unnatural, alien, artificially decreed.
Majority is suspicious about the biblical Supernatural miracles (feeding a large number of people with 5 loaves and 2 fishes; Jesus' bodily ascension to heaven after crucifixion), many reject such a doctrines as Paradise, Hell, angels, Satan, innocent Conception, "God's Mother" (Mariology), Trinity (non-monotheistic concept), Last Judgement Day, immortality of soul, resurrection of the dead (Math.22:31-32, the coming of a Messiah, universal Salvation [Math.19:25-26]; the practices like Eucharist, washing someone's feet, exorcism, invoking of Holy Ghost, "talking in tongues", healing through pastors, etc.
Partaking of man's blood and flesh is a typical Pagan cult, let it be merely a Christian symbol, and crucifix is a rudiment of ancient human sacrifices...

Many are alarmed and stopped by the unworldly/otherworldly Christian attitude to life:

Don't resist evil, when somebody hits you on your right cheek, turn to him another cheek;
love your enemies, bless those who curse you, be charitable to those hating you, pray for those offending and persecuting you [Math. 5:3; 5:43-44];
who wishes to take your shirt, give him also your clothes [Math.5:38-40], divide your possessions among the poor, don't care for the mundane things- food, drink, clothes;
"blessed are those of poor spirit";
hate your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and relatives, and your own life [Luke 10:34; 12:51; 14:26; Math.10:34; 16:24-25; John 12:25], leave your family, lose your soul for My sake; "My kingdom is not of this world";
be obedient to any authorities [Rom. 13:1-2; I Peter 2:13-14]...etc.
Imagine, such a religion might be rather constructed for the slaves...

Jesus hardly could appeal to "drinking his blood" and "eating his flesh" [Mark 14:22-24; John 6:53-54] – such a sort of a "Holy Communion" reflects the pagan remnants of cannibalism...
Hardly could he claim to take onto himself the sins of humanity and become the "Savior"...
Jesus didn't invent "original sin", nor aimed to establish an institute of the Church- a new Synagogue, and no monasteries as well...
The original Christian religion did not worship the dead crucified body of a saintly person, or relics and sanctified objects. The cult of a crucified corpse is as far from the symbol of Salvation, as the scull and bones...
SPIRIT and TRUTH are superior to religious rites, dogmas and cults, as well as any bureaucratic institutions.
If Jesus had appeared in later times, say, in the Middle Ages and later, he would have been horrified by the new Church hierarchy that seized power in the countries, colonized foreign lands, turned Christianity into "Churchianity"...

Many people aren't convinced of superiority of Belief (faith) over Deeds (works), being aware of importance of not in what we believe but *how* we believe, how we live...
Remember James 2:14,17,24 - "What good is it, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds ? Can such faith save him ?.. Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead/useless... A person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone..."

"Gebet und Froemmigkeit sind wertlos, wenn die richtige Tat nicht folgt..." (G.B.Ginzel)

What are the important function and purpose of religion - theology, creed, doctrines, ideology, or - instruction, guidance, moral education, psychotherapy, spiritual hygiene and training, and consequently man's psychologic health, self-discipline, right conduct ?..
Many are assured that religion concerns mainly a human inner sphere - memories, imagination, insights, intuition, inspiration, creativity, vision of life values and perspectives, the meaning of existence.
As Buddha said, "the greatest victor on earth is he who's conquered himself", became the master over himself (See Prov.25:28). That's probab1y the noblest task of a religion which is a weapon against mass culture and degradation, which can raise a man above animal plane/state, which is a Know-How that enables us to canalize our own atomic energy in a proper ways and to prevent/avoid personal troubles.
But to explain the outer, objective world in a purely/solely religious terms now-a-days is quite problematic. "Religion should serve to open the mind, to raise questions, to expand spiritual horizons. It disturbs us when a religious attitude has ready answers to all doubts and can reply to questions before they are even asked..."(rabbi Arthur Green). Religion is not all-dominating, it has its own domain within cultured living. "The ultimate purpose of religion is not the same as that of science, i.e. to discover the truth. Religion is concerned with truth but as an intermediate step on the way to an ultimate end - the creation of person who will live up to the full potential of his humanity" (H.S.Kushner). And beyond certain point, religion treated as the end and purpose in itself, may become a sort of idolatry – as soon as it ceases being an **instrument** of change, of self-control and survival. "Religion is not an answer, but a response" (rabbi J.Wittenberg).
As the first step towards a proper religious attitude, can't we rather suppose/ assume/ accept, than blindly believe ? What is more important – belief or spirit ?.. Values are more important than belief.

Many people are ready to see their lives in context of a refined Christianity devoid of myths, impossible miracles, extremes, properly translated and *re-interpreted*, which doesn't assert a strict, definite, limited image/identity of God (Isay.40:18), nor demands literal acceptance of the whole of the Scriptures (emending, adapting them in accordance with modern knowledge and society), which requires no rigid, strangling frames and patterns...
"Setting limits on the images we use for God is the essence of idolatry. When God is identified with particular aspects of reality while others are excluded from His domain, God's oneness becomes oneness of singularity instead of oneness of totality. Using a multiplicity of God's images invites us to see Him in/through the forms of a diverse and changing world. True monotheism invites us to extent the places in our lives where we can find God's presence..." (J.Plaskow) (+Isay.66:l).

God is neither Love, nor Supreme Reason only, or mere Holiness, Perfection etc., but **both** Love/Mercy **and** Law/ Justice/ Punishment [Is.63:6]; **both** Peace, Joy, Hope **and** Suffering, Pain, Disease, Sorrow, Fear, Death [Ex.4:24], Tragedy; **both** Good **and** Evil [Deut.30:15,19; Is.54:16; Jer.3:38; 2:5, 20-22; 32:42; Math.5:45); **both** Revelation **and** Labour, **both** Knowledge, Understanding, Wisdom/Reason, Righteousness, **and** Emptiness, Detachment, both Light and Darkness (Is.45:7; Amos 5:20), Fate; **both** Salvation **and** Calamity/Disaster [Is.30:30; Amos 3:6]; all aspects of Reality, Life...
"I am what I am, such as I am..."(Ex.3:14)

An idea that God has many aspects, helps to learn diversity/ variety and entirety/ wholeness, integrity of life, to treasure and respect it.
True God's Word elevates one's spirit, gives inner balance, hope and a new vision. God's revelations continue in each generation and have different forms. Yet any theoretical definition of God is dangerous.

2) The ACTUAL STATUS of JESUS of NAZARETH - most dramatic problem of two thousand years...
Today the majority of folks all over the world can't accept "personality cult" and idolization of Jesus, nor consider him a mythical Egyptian-Hellenistic-type Superman (or a magician) possessing the

godlike attributes, but - rather a teacher, Guide, spiritual leader, a prophet (Math.21:11; Luk.7:16; 24:19; John.6:14)**,** an example of godly living, a saint, a martyr, a symbol of Redemption, the great religious reformer.
In this respect, Islamic approach is more adequate. Leo Tolstoy was excommunicated by Russian Orthodox church for similar views.

Jesus once said about himself that the *son of humans* came into the world not to be served and worshiped (Mk.10:45), since "God is our King" (Is.33:22; Zephania 3:15; Zechariah 14:9).
Remember Psalm 89 and Isaya 40:18 - "Who is like the Lord among the heavenly beings ? O Lord God Almighty, who is like You ?"
And again, said Jesus: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Math.4:10).

Orthodox Christians treat Jesus as God Himself: "Jesus existed even before Creation- eternally"; he possesses attributes of the Creator: "all things were created by Christ" (see Isaia 45:18); "Let Us create... means a Trinity"; "Jesus sits at the right side of Heavenly Father"; he judges, retributes, forgives, redeems, resurrects the dead; Jesus is God's incarnation in human form, an immortal God-Man; "Jesus is alive and with us now" (like Lenin- a pagan idol), etc.

Possibly, Christianity began as a Jewish version of the Mediterranean/Egyptian mystery cult originated in Egypt - the tale of the god-man Osiris. We remember the Greek deities, like Hermes - the Son of Zeus, the Hindu concept of Krishna/Vishnu as God's avatara, as well as the pretensions of pharaohs, Antiochus Epiphanes, Caligula, Domician and Agrippa of being a Divinity incarnate in flesh on earth...

And yet, raised as a traditional Jew, Jesus himself would have hardly pretended for possessing mystical superhuman powers. Wasn't it the apostle Paul who inflicted such a Hellenistic/heathen interpretation ?
Legendary Jesus was not the founder of the Christian religion, he might not obviously say what in many cases the Gospels *ascribed to him*. "This was Paul who built upon the teachings of Jesus a theology which Jesus himself would hardly have approved..." (Journal "Manna" 13/86).

In fact, the Bible teaches the unity of God, not the Trinity, it says about the Son of God, not "God-the-Son": see Deut. 6:4; Is.45:5; 63:16; I Cor.8:6 ("To us there is but One God, the Father, of whom are all things"); John 5:30 ("I can of mine own self do nothing");
John 7:16; 14:28 ("My Father is greater than I"); I Tim.2:5; Jn.4:23; Math.12:32; Jn. 4:34; 14:24; Jn.14:10 (It's the Father living in me, who is doing His work"); Math.19:17 ("Why call you me good ? There is only one good - God")...
To claim "I and the Father are one", "Father is in me and I in the Father" (Jn.10:30,38) - is not the same as "I am God"!...
Paul also spoke of "God and Father of Jesus Christ" (II Cor.11:31; Eph.1:3), and Jesus himself referred to "my and your God" as to "my and your Father" (Jn. 20:17; I Cor.15:28). And on the cross this Son of man cried to the Only God (Math.27:46)...

Repeat again, how the Bible describes Jesus:

"My Father is greater than I" [John 14:28]
"My Father is greater than all" [John 10:29]
"I cast out devils by the Spirit of God" [Matthew 12:28]
"Why callest thou me good ? There is none good but one, that is, God." [Mark 10:18]
"Jesus cried with a loud voice... My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?" [Mark 15:34]
"No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, not the son, but only the Father" [Mark 13:32]
"Jesus answered, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord" [Mark 12:29]

"None of those who call me 'Lord' will enter the kingdom of God, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" [Matthew 7:21]
"I can of mine own self do nothing; as I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" [John 5:30]
"The word which ye hear is not mine but the Father's which sent me" [John 14:24]
"I have not come on my own, but Father sent me" [John 8:42]
"The crowds answered: This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" [Matthew 21:11]
"People of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" [Acts 2:22]

God spoke through Jesus, His agent, a translator from divine language into the human one, who was a new prophet and more than that. As it was said, "a sage is higher than a prophet"...
Should we consider Jesus a Messiah, liberator and Savior of the world [Psalm 105:21], if the nations are not united, nor reconciled with God, there's no universal justice, brotherhood, neither peace nor prosperity, while wickedness prevails over righteousness, and the man has not changed in essence for the past 50 thousand years...
Remember the recent war: "Wenn die Geschichte Jesu eine einzige Vorwegnahme und Bekraeftigung der messianischen Hoffnung Israels war, wie kann dann die Welt so boese sein, wie sie im Krieg war und wie sie offensichtlich noch ist ?.. Wenn der Messias angesichts einer solchen Katastrophe nicht gekommen ist, wozu soil er dann noch kommen ?..” (B.Klappert)
Then, maybe we should better speak of Messianic Age rather than of the coming of a particular magic person ? Alas, no man could save or redeem the whole mankind – that’s solely God’s function...

Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of man, came into this sinful, destructive world to proclaim a Renewed Covenant for all. Should we commit ourselves to Jesus, or - to God and truth ?...
Should we believe in Jesus, pray to Jesus, worship him, idolize him, turning him into a ridiculous cult, or - honor him and do as he taught and did ?..

If we are not pagans, only God may be the sole subject of worship and the ideal - not the prophets, saints, nor messiahs and heroes, nor kings, political leaders, Popes, rebbes, mullahs etc. (Ezek.14:13-20)
At last, we should return Jesus from heaven onto the earth where he belongs, forgetting fantastic pretentious of his fanatic followers, then religions might return to proper ways.
One of the Scriptures says that the Torah is not in heaven, and so Jesus (a Christian "substitute" for the Torah) is not in heaven either...

Can't we approach the matter simply: Jesus performed his Immolation as a psychological substitute for all previous ritual sacrifices (see Lev.16:5, 6, 9, 15,16), fulfilled his mission, died on the cross (or felt into a coma) and arose by God's grace to life...
That Jesus was arisen on the third day after crucifixion, might be a possible phenomenon, if he possessed extraordinary health. Then, if he has survived, upon meeting with his disciples, he might secretly leave Judea and flee to some safe place, becoming a living legend inspiring many generations to come.
Resurrection of Jesus was metaphorical: "Jesus was resurrected in the lives and dreams of his followers, the body of Christ is the church, not a reconstituted physical body" (magazine "Time" "145/14.IV.95).
Quite a legitimate questions: IF Jesus actually rose from the dead, then where did he disappear from historical scene since then, why didn't “the God’s Messiah” become immortal, nor fulfilled all his promises ?.. If he was a God-man, a Superhuman, he wouldn’t have died on the cross at all, and God-the-Father would not have left/abandoned him...

In general, the problem of the alleged “self-sacrifice” of Jesus remains hardly understandable: how could God-man bring Himself to sacrifice for the sake of humanity ? How could he redeem all

humanity, taking upon himself “punishment for collective sins” ? And, after New Testament, he was sacrificed as an ox or sheep - the remnant of bloody pagan cult !

How could Jesus atone for men’s sins? - that’s the task of each individual...
“The idea that God could only forgive our sins by having His son tortured to death as a scapegoat, is a deeply unpleasant, sick idea. If God wanted to forgive us our sins, why didn’t He just forgive them, why did He have to have His son tortured ?..” (Richard Dawkins)
God could never demand humans do any sacrifice - which is a primitive pagan superstition.

As compared to Christianity, in Islam there is no meaning of a Redeemer/Savior, of “original sin”, neither mediation of the priestly caste, nor notions of “Father”, “Son” or “Mother” – only God/Allah alone. Neither monks, nor missionaries.

Psychologically, Jesus gave us new values, priorities and perspectives: we learn after him to crucify/sacrifice our own sins and shortcomings for the sake of truth, for sake of others... We ought to rely on his commandment: spirit must rule the lower matter.

The historical identity of the person of Jesus Christ has been a concern for many generations of Christians at all times. Who was he in fact: Joshua/Yehoshua ha-Notzri - a revolutionary reformer opposed to Judaic religious establishment... Of Greco-Jewish or Aramaic origin ("a wandering Aramean preacher"), if not a Samaritan, or Essenes preacher from a Qumran desert, or some unknown Gnostic prophet Christos of Asia Minor ?...

Considering his identity, Jesus (ideologically being a liberal Pharisee rabbi preaching down rabbinic scholasticism and ritualism) never broke with Judaism, nor denied Mosaic Law, was loyal to the Torah: "I have not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them... Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments, will be least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commandments, will be great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven..." (Math.5:17-20; 19:l7; also Mk.12:29; Lk.11:28).

We may find similar attitude by Paul (Acts 21:24; 24:14; 26:5; Rom.3:31; 2:25-27; 7:12; 11:18; Rom.2:13; 15:8; I Cor.7:19; Gal.3:12).
Initially Jesus was inclined quite traditionally (Math.10:5,6; 15:24,26; Jn. 4:22). Remarkable was his refusal to heal one non-Jewish, Chanaanean, woman [Math. 15:22-28].
Many scholars argue that it was Paul (Shaul) who introduced Judaism to Gentiles in an adapted form.

"The Church and Christian community can never have Jesus without Hebrew Scriptures and traditions" (Dr. Paul van Buren). "Jesus ist ohne sein Judentum unverstaendlich" (F. Heer).
The Church itself in many aspects is an imitation of the Synagogue (which is a projection or model of the Jerusalem Temple in a new arrangement, interpretation)...

True innovations of Jesus and Paul were to abandon the cult of Pagan sacrifices, abolish circumcision, to proclaim Judaism for all nations, to treat Torah creatively, not literally, avoiding religious strictness, doing more than prescribed by the Jewish Law.

Jesus, as a progressive rabbi, taught that righteousness and moral/ethics are higher than rituals/ceremonials, that a formal physical purity does not mean spiritual purity, and that we should understand the relevant meaning and purpose behind the commandments...
Therefore Jesus was rejected by Jewish orthodox authorities of that time, the corrupt chief priesthood clique, and by local Jewish mob/crowd under the influence of the clergy.
"Disputes and collisions of Jesus with other Jews concerning the right understanding of God's Will did not undermine the frames of Judaism, but were just inter-Jewish debates..." (Theses of Evangelische Kirche Rheinland, 1979).

For his nonconformist views Jesus was ostracized (like Socrates and Aristotles) and punished by Sadducean priests (Tzaddikim), their attitude was reflected in the Talmudic “History of the hanged Joshua ha Notzri”.
Jesus negated Judaic cleric establishment. Judging by their fruit, he exposed their sins: "Your father is Devil, murderer and Liar !" [John 8:44; Luke 11:50-51] No wonder, a modern orthodox rabbi Adin Steinsaltz said that Jesus was worse [for Jewish establishment] than Hitler... Rabbis always claimed that “nothing good might come from Galilea”...

The New Testament might be considered as an “Oral Torah”- the commentaries, postscripts, *footnotes* to and *interpretations* on Tanakh (the Jewish Bible=Old Testament), and further development of the Scriptures. No discord between the Sermon on the Mount of Jesus (the Gospels) and the “Sermon on Sinai” of Moses (the Torah). “Jesus interpretiert das Gesetz im Kontext der biblischen Tradition” (W.Boehm), just slightly modernizing it.

In a sense, Christianity (which emerged as a **Judaic sect**, heresy, schism) was a new form of Judaism, not a replacement of Judaism, - namely **Neo-judaism** for Gentiles. "Christianity is a Midrashic interpretation of Judaism, whose roots remain deep within Jewish religious tradition. Its religio-theological messages and ethico-moral positions find their origins within Judaism" (rabbi Dr. Steven L. Jacobs).
Some people understand Christianity as a sort of messianic Judaism which believes that a Messiah once came to this earth.
Christianity cannot be separated from Judaism, its foundation. Since the Christian Bible is almost 3/4 the Torah (Jewish Testament), Christianity itself is essentially a derivative of Judaism...

In fact, “the difference in Jewish and Christian reading of the Torah is merely the difference between literary *interpretations* of one and the same text” (H. Halkin).
If the Older / Jewish /First Testament is a God's Covenant (Berith Hadash) with Israel, then the New / Judeo-Greek/Second Testament is a God's Covenant (der Bund) with Gentiles (Greeks, Romans, Europeans).
"Through the Jew Jesus the Torah further acts/works in Christianity and is given to Christians as God's Covenant" (Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken, 1979).
Similarly, the Quran pretends to be the God’s covenant with Arabs.

So the New Testament is a Christian "Oral Torah", a Gentile Halakha, while both Christians and Jews have the same "Written Torah" (properly, the Jewish Bible, Tanakh).
"Mit keinem anderen Volk ist die Kirche so eng verbunden. Christen und Juden sind in derselben goettlichen Heilsgeschichte verwurzelt, beide beanspruchen, Erben desselben Alten Testamentes zu sein" (Ecumenical Council of Churches, Bristol 1967).

Ideological separation between Christians and Jews is, in essence, only seeming, not significant. As John Paul II said, "meeting between the God's people of an Old Covenant not dissolved by God, and that of a New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, as if between the first and the second parts of her Bible..." (XI/1980, Mainz).
F.Nietzsche's assessment: “Judaism attains its final perfection in Christianity. A Christian is the same Jew, but of more liberal fashion...”

At the end of the second millennium of the Church history it’s possible for both parties to realize that the difference in interpretation of Jesus (God-man or a prophet?, Messiah or not?) is no reason for conflicts. Jesus stands between Synagogue and Church, connecting Christians and Jews.
More important than politics, far-fetched ideologic and theological arguments and distinctions in liturgy, is to "love truth and peace, love people and draw them nearer to Torah..." (Zech. 8:19; Pirkei Avot 1:12).
So, Christians have a shared mission with Jews. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit" (I Cor.12:4). "It matters not whether a person be Jew or Gentile, male or female, free or slave; it's all

according to a person's deeds that the Holy Spirit rests upon the man..." (Midrash, Seder Eliyahu Rabbah 10 - compare with Galatians 3:28).

Let's remember what apostle Paul (former rabbi Shaul) said:
"If the part of the offered dough is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches... Do not boast over other branches: you do not support the root, but the root supports you..." (Rom.11:16,18).
Hence a conclusion: “the cure for traditional Christian failures is a return to the Hebrew Bible's roots of Christ's piety and even to the original faith of Israel in which people felt themselves to be both God's creatures and responsible partners in the development of the earth...” (Friedrich Heer)

“The reason we are separated from the Jews is that we are still not fully Christians, and the Jews separate from us because they are not fully Jews. Completeness of Christianity embraces Judaism, and completeness of Judaism is Christianity...” (Vladimir S.Solovyov)
That means, more important to accept not merely Christianity or Judaism or Islam, but the **Whole** of God’s Word, however which is not limited with Mosaic religions alone...

Interesting in this respect are 2 official Church documents:

1. Declaration of the Second Vatican Council/Synod "Nostra aetate" (1965):
"Together with the prophets the Church waits for the Day that is known only to God, on which all the nations will be called on by One Lord and serve Him shoulder to shoulder..."

2. Declaration of Ecumenical Council of Churches (Bristol, 1967):
"We are sure that we will come together with Jews to a deeper understanding of Revelation of God. What form takes this future understanding, let it be left to God's Hands with the hope that He will lead both Jews and Christians to fullness/ wholeness of His truth..."

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# # #

* * * P r a y e r * * *

Hear, o brethren, God our Lord is One, no other gods but He;
God of all times and peoples,
Who created life and commands everything,
and daily renews Creation...
Who separated us from animal world,
Who restores the broken link of generations,
Who is both within and beyond us.

We praise God's messengers, all prophets and sages of the world,
from Zarathushtra to Hammurabi,
from Moses to Kautilya and Solon,
from Akhenaton and Manu to Confucius and Lao-tzu,
from Buddha to Jesus,
from Mohammad to Rumi, guru Nanak and Krishnamurti...
They all help us to clean our iniquities, change ourselves and comprehend true God’s Will...

O Lord, please forgive and purify us, correct us in all respects,
Give us strength to work and learn, and the will to resist evil and injustice,
Free us from fears and selfishness, give us reason, wisdom and endurance to cope with life,
Bestow us with inner peace and hope, ease our burdens and afflictions, protect and bless our families and friends;
Let us see without biases, think and act adequately and constructively...

Amen.

* * * **Islamic perspective** (general sketches) * * *

Let's take liberty to discuss some questions which may arise when we study religions. While one might agree with many Moslem doctrines and laws, yet for the foreigners it's hard to accept certain Biblical prophets- Lott/Lut, Isaac, Yakov/Yakub, Moshe/Musa, David/Daud and Shlomo/Suleiman whom we may consider not so righteous or perfect persons, since they committed heavy sins (if they historically existed).

1) Can we accept Moses/Moshe/Musa as a prophet ?

When they talk about the borrowed "sacred history"- common for Jews and Christians, don't forget the grave misdeeds of Moses, Joshua ben-Nun, kings Saul, David and Solomon, queen Esther, Judith etc.

Deuteronomy 20 of Tanakh prohibits killing of captured women and children. But - in fact- Moses, Joshua ben-Nun, kings David and Shaul violated that commandment and did many brutal actions, including the use of furnaces, threshers, saws, frying pans against their conquered enemies.

After introducing Ten Commandments Moses, in the name of his tribal lord Yahweh- preached harsh cruelty towards Canaan folks (Dt. 7:16, 20:16; Num.25:17): "Cursed are they, don't have mercy for them, destroy them; in their towns which are given to you, leave no single soul alive..." (remember the same slogan by Zechariah 12:6).

Military treatment of captured cities, including women and property, was very brutal (Deuter. 2:33-34; 3:6; 20:13-18; Josh.11:14 etc.).

Was that Genocide ordained/ commanded by God Himself- or Moshe and his gang ??... Could the "elected God's People" do such horrible things ?!...

To wage a holy war against mass depravity and moral degradation does not mean to destroy cities and exterminate civilian population... Was that terror out of "fear of or disdain for the way of life of settled agricultural and urban peoples- the Canaanites" (Encyclopaedia Britannica)?..

As compared to Moshe, Joshua ben Nun and king David, the prophet Mohammad (pbuh) always tried to abstain from violence, even towards the enemies. Before the battles he suggested to his warriors that they did not attempt on life of women, children, old men, worshippers, and those who surrender at their will, nor pursued those running from battle-field; that his warriors were merciful towards captives, and did not hurt fields and gardens of a conquered land... - quite opposite to all unholy instructions of Moses and his co-religionists...

Jewish rabbis claim that prophecy ceased from the time of destruction of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, and that wise men are higher than prophets. Does that mean that revelations of ancient Jewish prophets (described in the Bible/Tanakh) are no longer valid/relevant. And Mohammad said, "Scholars are the heirs of the prophets". So, should we abandon that foreign fallacious Yahwist tradition based on the Torah and Mosaic laws which may seem supremacist and extremist in their essence ?.. We may embrace the rational sayings of Isa, but be careful with the Old Testament (Tanakh) with its "prophets" and "sacred" history which are relevant for Orthodox Jews and Christian Zionists - there's a lot to be abrogated as a delusion therein.

As Ardeshir Mehta stresses, certain chapters of the Torah along with the Book of Joshua are the sort of "a racist, genocidal document"...

One more example. How could Allah order Avraam to commit the heavy crime- knife his own son Yitzhak as a ritual/sacrificial animal ? Why would God wish to test anyone in such a strange harsh way ? (rather it were sickly hallucinations or a pagan rudiment)...

For many it's hard to accept *as the prophets* Adam, Noah, Jov/Job/Ayub, Lott/Lut, Abraham, Yitzhak, Jaacov, Yosef, Yonah/Yunus, Moshe/Musa, Aaron/Harun, David/Daud, Shlomo/Suleiman, Daniel and many other alleged personages of the original Jewish scriptures.

And we see no special guilt in Egyptian Pharaoh (whose subjects were deceived and robbed by ancient Hyksos).

The question is: what's more important - to follow Judaic prophets or imams ?...

It seems, true religion may incorporate various holy prophets and sages, like Zarathushtra (possibly mentioned in Sura Al-Kahf 18:83 under the name of Zulkarnein?), Buddha, Yeshua/Isa, guru Nanak, some philosophers like Kun-Tzu, Lao-Tzu, Socrates, Farabi, Rumi... ending with great Mohammad. It seems, Zoroastrians, Buddhists and Sikhs, are more *pak* (pure) than many "people of the Book"...

Anyway. the more prophets and sages we incorporate, the more strength and Light we acquire...

2) There are some other not very decisive issues of religious system which need to be discussed, reconsidered and properly understood, such as:

2.1 Why did Allah create Evil powers and Injustice, the predators, murderers, robbers, villains of all sorts, so many dangerous illnesses ?...

Why did He *not* destroy Shaitan in the beginning ?... So, as the result, this world became base, hostile, unjust, crying with death, destruction, suffering, sorrow and darkness... through ages and millennia "homo homini lupus est", and humans always remained victims of wars and natural cataclysms...

2.2 Why didn't Allah warn Adam and Hawa beforehand about intrigues of Shaitan/Iblis, nor did stop them from eating of the forbidden tree, nor instructed them about sin ?...

2.3 There's a risk of detailed visualization (imagination) of Paradise (huris, paradise levels, gates, etc.);

2.4 Mystical deportation of the Prophet from Mecca to Jerusalem (divine powers are subtle, invisible to an ordinary human view, have nothing with mystics, magic or miracles)...

2.5 The obscure concept of angels and *jinns* [can Allah have any *associates*, assistants - aren't they a pagan remnants ?]...

2.6 Archaic sacrifices of animals on Kurban-bairam after Khajj :

Yet Allah does not need any sacrifices on man's part- that cruel pagan cult/relic: see Quran, Al-Khaj 22:37; references to Judaic Tanakh (Yitzhak etc.) are hardly relevant; prophet Isa abolished all sacrifices; Pithagoras and Zarathushtra strictly opposed any sacrifices; and imam Ali said that prayer replaced sacrifice to God (Nahj al-Balagha, 136)... The Sufis and Bahai don't practice that obsolete cult either...

Primitive pagan idea reflected in the Bible - to sacrifice the best cattle in order to cajole a fictitious high Deity...(only predators might be sacrificed, if needed)

2.7 Some questions of diet, drinking wine etc.;

Fasting on holidays: how can one keep fasting only in the daytime and break it in the evening ? - eating in the night time (as well as smoking) and not drinking water in the daytime is a harmful practice...

2.8 Kibla: why to turn to Kaaba during prayer ? - Allah has *NO* DIRECTION...

2.9 Wearing of head cover [should it apply to everybody, in any climate ?];

2.10 Knowledge of Arabic (?);

2.11 Circumcision [a pagan unnatural traumatic sacrificial cult - Isa was against it]; if Allah created the man as he is - how can he be entitled to mutilate, hurt himself ?; it was a Egypto-Babylonian (later Jewish) covenant with *pagan* gods through blood offering...

2.12 Plucking out hair is not obligatory (if cutting one's beard is not advisable, the more so about cutting/plucking hair on other spots);

2.13 What is Shariah's attitude to concubines - is it a historic archaism or considered acceptable ? Why did they tolerate harems in Ottoman Empire and during caliphate ?

A good point: "It is a well-acknowledged principle that a Hadith should be interpreted against the background of the actual context that led the Prophet to say or do what he did. Furthermore, when applying the Hadith to the present situation, we need to consider the changed circumstances. It is meaningless to expect the Prophet to have explained all in advance; rather, it is the duty of modern scholars to do this interpretation in the right way, so as to make the example of the Prophet relevant to the present times.

It is only natural that some of the things that the Prophet did or said may not correspond to a particular time or situation; but that does not make such examples insignificant or irrelevant. In the future, situations and conditions may arise that call for decisions or rulings based on those examples..." (Shahul Hameed).

It seems, the differences between Sunni and Shia Islam should be ignored, never stressed: they are only different *interpretations* of the same source…

Sad fact is antagonisms between different Moslem countries: Pakistan - vs Bangladesh, Arab Gulf states and Turkey - vs Libya, Turkey - vs Kurds, Gulf states - vs Iran, etc... Then where is Islamic unity, united Ummah ?... And there is plenty of treachery instead...
Remember: "Those who divide themselves into sects, do not belong with you. Their judgment rests with God, then He will inform them of everything they have done" [Quran 6:159]

Islam does not deny man's reason and enquiry. For sure, the matters of regional traditions should not shatter the essence of faith, religious attitude and useful practices.

3) Albanian, Chechenian, Al-Qaida, ISIS and other aggressive groups hiding under *pseudo*-Islam, must be condemned as the criminals... Many so called "ethnic Moslems" have nothing in common with true Islam- be it Albanians, Chechens, Azerees, Dagestanees, Uzbeks, Tadzhiks, Afghanis, Turks, Kurds and others who live by drug traffic, slave-trade, fake spirits distribution and brothel-keeping...

Paradoxically, there are many Western evils in UAE, Egypt, Turkey and other Eastern places dominated by America... Arab League is rather an American evil tool...

These are amateurish questions of a student. While, as Robert Edwards put it, "Islam is more modern than given credit, it is also dynamic with a definite purpose in the world today", this religion has a positive potential in different regions of the planet, it helps to resist Evil in this cruel corrupt world.

I believe, imam *Mahdi* may purify Islam from the harmful remnants of tribal Yahvism: without parting with an obsolete ideological fundamentals we'll never see the Truth.

Certain reforms are required in traditional Islam as well, for example, abdication of references to some dishonorable Jewish prophets and kings, the elimination of pagan cults of sacrifice of animals and circumcision, and the acknowledgement of many wise righteous men beyond Islam. As ancient Ibrahim of Ur destroyed idols, so imam Mahdi shall eliminate prejudices and *clean* religion of all

pagan irrelevant things... “It is imperative that total destruction must precede every new construction, in this process lies the solution of the troubles of life” (*Iqbal)*

Then Islam will be a powerful instrument of men’s evolution.

Islam must be not a cult or dogma, but a guidance for right action, the way of life, the self-protecting First Aid. And it contains useful elements of the Public Law...

Values are certainly higher than merely canons and rituals. So let’s follow the basic approach: religion must ease our living, not complicate/burden it; faith and religion should not be compelling, imposing a constraint on people, in order not to lose their impact.

The Prophet said: BRING EASE IN DEEN (Islam + Iman + all Mamelat in social life, business, human, etc.)
"YOU HAVE BEEN SENT TO MAKE THINGS EASY AND NOT TO MAKE THEM DIFFICULT" (Hadeeth 220 by Abu Huraira)

“Whoever does a good deed in order to show off, Allah will expose his intentions on the Day of Resurrection, and whoever puts the people into difficulties, Allah will put him into difficulties on the Day of Resurrection” (Hadeeth 6693 by Tarif Abi Tamima).

Quran offers freedom of faith. There is NO temporal punishment for not believing in Quran or God:

18.29: The truth is from your Lord. Then whoever wills let him believe, and whoever wills let him disbelieve.

10.99: Had your Lord willed, all the people on earth would have believed. Do you want to force the people to become believers ? “If it had been your Lord’s will, all of the people on Earth would have believed. Would you then compel the people so to have them believe?” [Sûrah Yûnus: 99]

42.48: If they turn away, we did not send you as their guardian. Your sole mission is delivering the message.

109.6: Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.

2.256: “**Let there be no compulsion in religion**. Truth has been made clear from error. Whoever rejects false worship and believes in Allah, has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And Allah hears and knows all things.” [Sûrah al-Baqarah: 256];

17.15: Who receives guidance, receives it for his own benefit: who goes astray does so to his own loss: No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another.

Wise, useful note: “We Muslims are busy bickering over whether to fold or unfold our hands during namaz, while the enemy is devising ways of cutting them off...” (Roohullah Khomeni)...

One wish for the sake of truth: orthodox Muslims might learn a lot from the Sufis with their deep, pure, living traditions…

IN SEARCH OF the NEW MEANING of RELIGIONS in THE THIRD MILLENNIUM...

* * * ISSUES for DISCUSSION: COMMENTARIES on GOD, Chosen People, Torah et cetera * * *

What is the main ground of religions - formal tradition, or sincere belief ? What is the main subject of religion - spiritual training, correction of behavior, human development, or some unknown "transcendental" reality of higher plane ?

Heavy obstacle for the majority is man's relation to God:
Though God created everything, He hid Himself from the world, withdrew from His creatures, does not interfere into human affairs, is indifferent to man's living, does not patronize/care for us, is beyond good and evil in this mad world... ["Said the Holy One to the man: if you spoil and destroy My world, there is no one to repair it after you"- Kohelet Raba, 9]

Can there be real dialogue between man and God ?

Why His kindness and justice reveal themselves so rarely in life ?

Why does He allow wars, oppression, hunger, catastrophes, crimes, terrorism, deadly accidents, epidemics, pathologies, etc. ?..

Orthodox Jews seek justification for any event and disease: Dina paid for her grandmother's sin, Onan died because of the sin of his father Judah, the destruction of the Temple resulted from the sins of Israel, Holocaust - from the apostasy and assimilation, Meir Kahane was killed because of his pretending on the role of Mashiah, etc.

According to their logic, every accident and disaster have certain ground and resemble God's act, thus should be accepted thankfully. Does it mean that death is planned from the above ? Is pain (e.g. toothache, headache, et al) or illness a certain punishment ?.. What, if in one's car the wheel breaks off and a car hits a tree ?.. If you hurt your foot while walking along the street, or fall down, or some car splashes mud onto your suit and the face, or if your property is stolen; if your child damages a costly thing, etc. - is all that predestined, programmed by God ?..
What for did God create viruses, ticks, scorpions, rats, snakes, etc.?...

Can God prevent misfortunes and tragedies ?..

Does the Higher Reason exist in this world, if criminals escape punishment ?...

God protected the murderer Cain (Gen.4:15), Lameh remained safe (Gen. 4:24), as well as Lott's daughters; sinned Jacob, Joseph brothers, the kings David, Shlomo (who brought his elder brother Adonia to death), Ahab, et al...

Ungodly immoral people everywhere enjoy living without consequences (Caligula, Titus, Genghis Khan, Timur, Batu & Co., European inquisitors, Ivan the Terrible, Lenin, Trotzky, Stalin, Malenkov, Kaganovich, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, Mengistu, Sharon, Bush, Obama, mafias of all sorts)...

Evil and suffering prevail in the world (Job 21:7; 12:6; Eccl.7:15; 9:2-15; 9:11; Jer.12:1,2). Egoists and the dishonest survive and prosper, people kill one another, animals devour one another, children are being born with defects and suffer from hereditary ailments; so many people on earth have died from plague, smallpox, cholera, malaria, tuberculosis, flu, and will die from AIDS, cancer, etc. So many invalids around...

The Bible tells about mass violence to a stranger's wife in an ancient Judean town, her husband thereupon cut her corpse into pieces and sent them all over the land – in vain, the requital *from above* didn't happen...
Why God did not stop the devastating invasions of Huns, Mongols and Turks onto Europe, nor prevented all numerous European wars, and nor Chernobyl nuclear explosion ?...
Many prominent religious leaders, the most faithful, fell victims of evil: the apostles Paul, Jacob, Peter, Simon, rabbi Akiva, Jan Hus, G.Savonarola, et al. Not only religious ones: remember Socrates, Giordano Bruno, Mahatma Gandhi, Janusz Korczak...

God saved neither His suffering Son Jesus, nor His people Israel during the WW II, which became the last test of God's love for the "elected nation"... So "can God be presented as father after Auschwitz ?" (F.Heer)

And God didn't protect hundreds of thousands of righteous, innocent people who were slain in Russia and Ukraine after Bolshevik revolution...

After our predatory, deadly history, after Bolshevik genocide and Shoah, German invasion, many people claim better to have a hope on ourselves than on Almighty, the Merciful One...

So the fundamental question arises - either innocent, holiest, but ineffectual, superfluous God, or omnipotent but less than perfectly good (J.K.Roth).

"To say that God has no connection with Evil, is to deny the real power of Evil in the world, or to deny the oneness of God..." (J.Plaskow) (+ Isaia 45:7)...

"The traditional theological notion of providence as found in Christianity, Judaism and Islam - i.e. that God provides for the individual in accordance with the person's piousness, theology of a responsive and saving God didn't survive the test of the Holocaust and all XX century's tragedies..." (R.S.Frey).

"The God we'd like to have, who would prevent our undergoing the deepest anguishes, doesn't exist..." (J.A. Miller).

That traditional mythic God never suggests to us what to do, where to go, how to act in certain circumstances, how to live in the world, where to draw intuition, inspiration and insight...

General public today does not believe seriously that good deeds and righteous conduct lead to safety, success, well-being, health, etc. As rabbi Raba said: "Life, children and food/ livelihood depend not on piety but on luck/ fortune"...

So, not so many men are ready to wait for justice in the World-to-come...

Isn't universal peace (Isaia 11:6-8; 65:25) an Utopia ? Never will the wolf live with the lamb, leopard with the goat, the calf with the lion (who won't eat the straw like an ox), nor the cow with the bear, and an infant hardly shall play near the cobra nest...

Predators, killers, aggressors, scoundrels, crooks, hatred, envy, greed, conflicts are eternal. If God created **both** good and evil, how then this world could change, and how can a Messiah abolish or amend what God made ?..

Now-a-days people believe that everything can be explained in terms of Nature, nothing behind it, they wholly accept natural laws of Universe, natural order of things, revelations of Life - instead of unapproachable/ unattainable, non-cognizable, transcendental God who is not to rely upon in mundane matters and concerns...

People ask: whom to worship - God or Mother Nature, or take both as one and the same, as B.Spinoza did ?

Is God a Universe, Cosmos, or rather some subjective reality, an invented psychological aid ?

Some people try to explain God-concept as creative Power within Nature (M.Kaplan), or as omnipresent "**Energy-Information Field**" inherent in any object of Universe, surrounding everything in the world.

People are not sure of human influence (through prayer and the rites) on God and the world. What if someone sincerely prays, and all his hopes and wishes are in vain (remember war or criminal experience) ?...

Does God really hear and help the man ? Or His mercy depends on man's own efforts ?.. As they say, "God helps those who help themselves" (Aesop)...

God may only give chances, possibilities, warnings, just opens one's mind/vision, give a subtle hints, but the rest depends on the man himself...

What is significant: if God is neutral ("All of being"), this does not mean that WE should be passive, that we should "not resist evil" and injustice. We are the partners, since the world was created for us men, since "the Lord made the man a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor, made him the ruler over the works of God's hands" (Ps.8:5, 6). And God waits for us, empowers us to decide and to choose...

Contrary to a traditional prescription in Proverbs 3:5, Rabbi Steven L. Jacobs brilliantly put it: “Humanity cannot, now or ever, depend on God for its very survival, but must depend upon itself and its very willingness to develop interdependent links as the only reasonable opportunities for that survival...”

Religion is an element/ aspect of living, *not* the end in itself. Haven't we got enough important Mitzvot (precepts, commandments, duties) in life *beyond the given Scriptures* - our work, study, our family, health-care, hygiene, our house, safety rules, etc. which all take most of our daily time and efforts ? (Ben Sirah 3:23)...

What is holier - the house of prayer or... the Kindergarten ?...

Who is of more importance - a priest or... a good physician ?... More important to human life – prayer or... physical exercises (*what goes first*) ?...

Which is superior - religious/ communal festivals or family celebrations and occasions ?...

What is higher - human life or religious teaching/ dogmatic faith/prescriptions ?...

Isn't our home/ family a most sacred Temple, the Holy of Holies ?...

Who needs us more - a congregation, community, synagogue/ church/mosque, or our own family and relatives ?...

The same way we could ask, what is more beautiful - a picture, a statue, a fashion/model show, a variety entertainment/show, Theaterstueck, ballet, or... immortal living Nature ?...

Unfortunately, many take religion as a kind of self-suggestion [if not a hypnosis, as in case with many Christian churches and preachers]. Others consider it as the means of ethical/ moral education, self-control and psycho-prophylactics, spiritual therapy, a *code of conduct* [or in technical terms, a kind of a Basic Supporting/correcting Life Program], rather than a dogmatic creed...

Religion cannot pretend for scientific explanation of the world, it has a different mission - to define the border line between the man and the animal, to transform an ape, subhuman into Homo Sapiens, and to preserve morals in human society.

As God separated light from darkness, the day from the night, the Sabbath from the rest weekdays, the holy from the vanity, so He separated the man from the beasts of the earth - “in the image of God”.

Ultimate goal of both positive religion and any other “system” (philosophical or psychological) is a logical, rational/reasonable, motivated, balanced, constructive human behavior, irrespective of one's conceptual faith.

The aim and meaning of religion is spiritual training which leads to self-governance, not just seeking and defining reality...

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I) Identity and terminology.

The question is not whether “God” exists or not, but what do we mean by "God"...
For sure, a concrete definition of Sacred Image is idolatry and profanation of the Holy Name (HaShem).

“I am what I am - said God to prophets - not what people imagine”...
As far as we understand it now, perhaps the most safe approximate definitions of G-d *might be* the following:

1) *in objective sense*:
enigmatic COSMIC SOURCE OF LIFE, our Cosmic Father (in all its variety, immensity and infinity)...
Supreme Omnipresent Cosmic Power, creating and supporting all Universes...
or hidden Cosmic Energy...
or the Cosmic Law, the Law of Heaven...
or Supreme Cosmic Order...

or - the WHOLE of REALITY...

2) *in subjective sense*:
man's psychological aid/ protection; antidote against all forms of idolatry and degrading virulent destructive cultures...
absolute Truth...

To be "established in God", to understand His Will means not to worship some Chief Deity or Magician, but to avoid any cult, deification, idealization, illusions, any extremes, excesses, to keep inner balance and independence, be responsive to ecology, interconnectedness, interaction of Live, see things as they are, in context of the Whole Reality...

Should we worship the Almighty, or rather submit to His inevitable natural/Cosmic Laws ?...

God is the Master of Universe, Whom we should revere, and Whom we should listen to, as our Eternal Father. Yet He is impossible to cognize, to describe or formulate – because He is not the concept, but Greatest Enigma...

Orthodox authorities, both Jewish and Christian, often require blind acceptance and obedience without seeking reasonable explanation/ meaning/ rationale of the Scriptures, *sense* behind the rites and traditions, they cling to inadequate understanding/notion of God. The result: on the one hand- religious hypocrisy, on the other- primitive materialism, nihilism, depravity, decay in people...

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II) In view of that, shouldn't we choose and use the *reasonable* Christian, Buddhist, Manichaean, Islamic, Sufi, Bahai, Sikh, Zoroastrian, Spinozian, Krishnamurtian, as well as scientific ideas and concepts ?

God is One (*Adonai Ehad*), so why do we object visiting other places of worship of various confessions ? A jewel has many facets, each having its own beauty. Whichever religion fulfils its main function - helps people to establish self-command, develop willpower, overcome pain and distress, improve social relationships, promotes proper conduct and inner balance, makes us more human, - let it be...

"In the same way that two people may require different medicines for the same illness, different people may respond to different religious regimens while pursuing the same ultimate goals..." (rabbi H.S.Kushner)

Various religions do the same task, though in different ways and forms, offering us wider spectrum of understanding.

No priority should be given to any biblical figure or a prophet - all have their own messages. If someone considers Jesus (Yeshua ha-Notzri) being unnecessary mediator between the man and God, then who were Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ehezkiel and other prophets ?..

Jesus - a nonconformist Pharisee rabbi, did not abandon, but re-interpreted, expanded, enriched, developed the Judaic Law, found new meaning in it, fought religious formalism, abolished the invalid commandments and rituals...

"Freedom from the law is not an abrogation of the law, but the change/ renewal of focus..." (James F. Moore)

Jesus taught that the Law, commands, rituals (including Shabbat and festivals), diet (Kashrut), prayers and other religious regulations should not become a **cult**, an end in itself, - everything must

serve the man and society... The purpose of all religious practices is to remind us of Truth, Justice and of the higher values in life.

Alive religion, while not rejecting the divine covenants given through all prophets and sages, cannot deny continuous, evolving, multi-faceted, multi-form revelations. "It is theologically ridiculous to preach a faith in Universal omnipresent God and to claim that all human knowledge of Him is encapsulated exclusively in one tradition. It is through the benefit of encounter with others' knowledge of Him, that we are able to expand to the greatest extent our own encounter with the Divine..." (rabbi David Rosen).

"We ought to be open to the insights and experiences which *other* religious traditions and communities have to offer, which may have been overlooked or neglected in our own traditions and communities..." (Statement of the International Council of Christians and Jews, VII-92).
We should bear in mind: there exist neither completely perfect teaching, nor absolutely right, faultless prophets for-all-and-forever, and no straight path to God and salvation...

To survive, Judaism needs enrichment by certain elements and ideas of the reformed Christianity (e.g. Unitarian and Nestorian brand), Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Lao-tzu, Islam, Sufism, Sikhism, J.Krishnamurti, modern sciences, since the Torah must incorporate all useful knowledge. One does not exclude another, all are the parts of One Truth. If Judaism rejects other vital elements of true knowledge, it is not viable and durable.

"For proper understanding of the Torah is necessary general knowledge of all sciences. Torah and science exist together..." (Eliyahu Gaon of Vilna).

Due approach to the Torah (as well as any teaching and theory) is: accept everything which does not contradict truth, reality; omit what is foreign to you, trust your intuition, experience, common sense. No teaching, no Scripture, no religion, no ideology, no theory should prevail over reality or dictate to us each and every step...

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* * * III) Direct parallels between Judaism and Christianity :

Both believe in redemption through sacrifice (in various forms)...

Both perceive God as an antropomorphic being, that is the main mistake of both traditions, such an image of God weakens religion itself...

Both believe that the man was created in God’s image, - so human person should be respected...

Both accept angels - other supernatural divine beings besides God (“God’s attendants”), - and that is not a monotheist conception...

Both believe in demons or Satan that are also the remnants of paganism...

Both embrace Paradise and Hell (forgetting Eccles. 9:2,5,10)...

Both believe in (and wait for) Messiah’ coming (Christos=Mashiah), as well as in resurrection of the dead

[*though* rabbi Hillel said: “the Jews have no Messiah, for G-d Himself shall liberate them”(Sanhedrin 99)]...

Both accept the Hebrew Bible as the word of God and the foundation of theology...

Both have the same starting point - the Jewish Articles of faith:
the first Mitzvah for Jesus was "Sh'ma Israel" (Mk.12:29,30) and the second Mitzvah - Levit.19:18; there are many parallels between the Mount Sermon and the Torah postulates: e.g. compare Math. 7:12 with the similar saying of rabbi Hillel, or Math. 5:24 with Talmud Yoma 85-b, Math.5:39 with Eicha/Lament. 3:30; Jesus saying on love to enemies in Math.5:44 draws on the Jewish sources- the Hebrew Bible and Talmud, etc.

Both sister-religions aim at reconciliation with God (Teshuva), perfection of the world and establishing God's reign/kingdom on earth...

Both Jews and Christians call themselves “Israel”- God's people, the people of God's Covenant...

"Wir duerfen nicht mehr von einem "alten" und von einem "neuen" Gottesvolk reden, sondern nur von dem einen Gottesvolk, dem Israel..." (Thesen von Evangelischen Kirche Rheinlands, 1979)

Both celebrate Sabbath, Easter (Passover) and Pentecost/Shavuot, on different dates. In essence, Christmas resembles Hanukkah - the feast of Lights.

There are many similarities in God's service of both: Scripture reading, benedictions, prayers, etc. Washing hands in a church was borrowed from a Judaic tradition...

Both use candles and sanctify bread and wine (on various proposals)...

Both use the same liturgical blessing "Shalom ale'chem=Peace be with you", and the formulas like "Halleluyah", "Amen", etc.

Liturgical prayer "Sanctus" resembles "Keddusha", and Kaddish resembles the Requiem Mass, etc.

The concepts of Holy Spirit and Shekhina are identical...

Both Jews and Christians practice immersion in water (baptism in a mikvah) converting the proselytes...

Both celebrate Bar-Mitzvah or Confirmation rite...

There are similarities in observing the mourning and Jahrzeit, etc.

Liberal Jews, like Christians, use the organ and a choir for services (and singing of an Orthodox chazzan [cantor] resembles that of a mullah)...

Synagogue and Church are similar in architecture...

And what else is common for both, "Christianity and Judaism have to undertake fundamental revisions..." (L.Ragaz).

In the view of the above, all our mutual contradictions and claims lose their meaning...

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IV) Why should **nationality** be defined by one's mother ?

In Biblical times the lineage (descent) followed the father, not the mother, the status of a cohen was transferred through one’s father, a son inherited family's property, a wife and children should adopt minhagim (customs/ traditions) of a husband/ father. The later adopted tradition (of rather ancient Roman style) is genetically incorrect: say, what if one’s father is a Negro, Mongol, Turk, Gypsy, Ethiopian, Arab, Uzbek, etc., while his mother is a Jewess, - then who actually is their child ??..

To define religious identity just by one’s mother’s nationality, one's ethnicity (by virtue of biology) is absurdity. Self-identification is determined not by mere one's blood/race, but rather by one's CULTURE, mentality, and behavior.

At least, what matters, in terms of rabbi Steven Jacobs, is interaction/ interplay of religious, cultural and ethnical/genetic components within the man. The most important is not WHO am I, but WHAT I am...

Who is dearer to God - a bad, wicked Jew, or a good Gentile ?.. Which values are higher - national/ tribal, or religious/ moral/ethical - those elaborated by best human experience ?.. Should all and every "passport Jews" be regarded as our friends – those like A.Sharon, Berezovsky, Gusinsky, Marc Rich, R.Abramovich, Perle, Wolfowitz, D.Zakheim, Abramoff ?..[see I Corinth.5:11,13]

There are jews and Jews (just the same as there are christians and Christians). Far from all and every Jew meet authentic “Judaic” criteria in a religious sense [Rom. 9:6]. Jewry itself never have been homogeneous/ monolithic ideologically, socially, politically. Jews are no exception to be dominated by local/surrounding cultures of residence (compare Sephardim and Ashkenazim, or Russian Jews, Romanian Jews and German Jews)...

Many Russian Jews did away with Torah, they were subject to vulgarity and obscenity hardly compatible with high morals; we remember a plenty of communist fanatics, commissars, CheKa-NKVD investigators/ inquisitors, party *nomenklatura*, KGB agents and all sorts of swindlers, crooks and rogues among the "Holy Nation"... Oy-wey, is *Jewish* mafia holier than other mafias ?..."What difference is there between Babylonian robbers and Palestinian bandits ?" (Avoda Zarah 26)

Does an ideal/model/elected nation exist ? Everywhere there were/are people discrediting their own nation and religion, and many Jews did/do their utmost to compromise and disgrace themselves...

Isn't a "Nation/Kingdom of priests", a "Holy Nation", the "Light for the nations/Gentiles" an Utopia, if not a caricature ? (see Deut.7:6,14; 26:19; 28:1; Exod.19:6; Is.42:6; 49:6; 61:6; 62:3)...

If Orthodox Jews might build their ideas on Deuteronomy 26:19 et al, then Orthodox Christians might build theirs on Isaiah 1:4; 63:19; Jeremiah 6:13,30; 7:28,29; 32:30-32; Ezekiel 36:31-32; Hosea 4:1,2,6-9 etc.

Rather than "elected by God", ancient Jews were among the first who discovered true God and values in the surrounding world, who chose to live under the new Law and revealed/introduced it to others...[1]

But could God love and elect a *sole* nation, or He might admit others to His covenant, when they deserved, extending His *Berith* to "Goyim" ?..

The myth that some nation was a "witness to God's revelations", "carries the Covenantal message", represents a "testimony of Divine presence", may give an impression of a megalomania...

If allegedly the God's Word came out from Zion, it doesn't mean that it forever remains only within native Israel (see John 4:23). "**There cannot be a religion connected with only one nation**" (prof. A.B.Yehoshua). First Jeremiah (18:7-10), and later Jesus from Nazareth and his apostles proclaimed: a holy, God-chosen nation (as well as national Messianism) is a fiction, fantasy, mystification and hypocrisy. Rather not a "holy *nation*" but the holy *people*, since "many are invited, but few are chosen" (Math.22:14; 7:14)...

No nation is sacred or wicked/ impure/ cursed: - maybe rather able/skillful, rationally thinking, high-organized, *or* retarded/ unreasonable, poor-organized...
Most important criterion: if a nation is conscientious, scrupulous and constructive, - or unscrupulous, irresponsible and parasitic...

Nationality itself is no virtue. Proclaiming certain nation as a cult, "God-elected", worshipping it as a holly one, is a sacrilege: we underestimate God as the only Light to nations, and we belittle the importance of other deserving nations, i.e. again we fall into idolatry, if not Mafiosi philosophy and self-deception...

When nationality or belonging to a clan becomes MAIN CRITERION of self-importance, it begets nothing but Nazism [cultural, religious or political] and mafias. Hence "chosenness" turns into all-permissiveness for one's own kind, condescension towards one's own kind, indulgence to own crimes, the lack of any self-criticism...

Jews are neither superior nor exclusive folk. All people are equal before the Law which has priority over the man's customs [Levit. 24:22]. Jews were not God-chosen, but God-inspired people. Concerning a mythical "national election", even Meir Kahane once said: "I have the same blood as

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[1] Mosaic Law (the Torah) was influenced by monotheism introduced to Israelites by Mosis, as well as by Zoroastrian ideas, Egyptian beliefs, Hammurabi's laws and Hittite moral code.

There is a hypothesis that Mose/Mosis - an Egyptian prince/viceroy or priest, the follower of a monotheist reformer pharaoh Akhenaton, fled away from religious persecution to Canaan with a group of 15000-20000 Hyksos or Habiru. Moses and his Levites carried out a solid research work, creating their compilation (if the Torah did not ever fall upon them from above at Sinai)... The term "Adonai" might be derived from Egyptian "Aton", and some translated the name "Israel" as the "Tomb of god Ra"... Interesting associations: Ya-Huda (O Lord)= Yehuda; AvRam= Father G-d :)

Goyim, the same skin as Goyim, but I've got the Torah", - well, just the same as Christians)|[2] As they say, before God there's neither a Hellene nor a Jew (Rom.2:11). "There is no difference between a Jew and a Gentile; the same Lord is Lord of all and blesses all who call on Him..." (Rom.10:12). "In one spirit we are one body, whether Jews or Gentiles" (I Cor.12) [+ Joel 2:32 and Midrash Eliahu Rabbah 10].

What is important: idealization, sanctification/ consecration/ deification of *any* nation is a risky thing, and again, Israel's true mission is not "to teach the world" but to *serve* the world equally with everyone...

Since there is a confusion of ethnic and religious notions within the term "Jew", we may attempt to offer a "technical" suggestion on Who is Who.

Ethnically you may be considered a Jew (of a Jewish origin), if you are a son/daughter of an ethnic Jew/Jewess from any side by choice, if your parents may confirm your descent and Jewish upbringing.

Religiously you may be considered a Judaist, a member of a synagogue/ congregation/ community, whoever you are- a Jew or Gentile, when you answer a Judaic criteria. If not, if you are a wicked person, you must be excommunicated- be you a Gentile or an ethnic Jew. So an ethnic Jew is only a potential "Judaist" [though being religious is no automatic guarantee of perfection and salvation].

Unfortunately, in fact, many Orthodox rabbis and Kehila accept only ethnic Jews- thus practice a *racist* attitude...

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V) Could the Torah have been divinely given at Sinai, at once and for ever ? Or it was "eine Frucht der Tradition" (Shalom Ben-Chorin), a product of spiritual evolution, if not the sort of "a compilation from various sources inserted into the narrative" (Encyclopaedia Britannica)...
"Torah is not the literal word of God. The process of revelation and response was not finished in the past... (T.Frymer-Kensky)
Can Torah include ALL the truth and answer ANY existing problems ?.. "**The Bible contains a human and divine elements, both error and truth**" (Rabbi Louis Jacobs).

The Scriptures have contradictions, inconsistencies, obscurities, the unreasonable, impractical, inadequate laws and postulates, including the absurdities.

"Old rituals, ceremonials and rules often appear illogical, irrelevant, superstitious and even unrighteous in confrontation with contemporary mentality, culture, knowledge, sensitivities and conditions..." (Rabbi Moshe Ish-Horowicz)

"Certain mitzvot were a product of limited historical circumstances and fell into disuse when the times changed" (Rabbi R.Biale).

"A living culture cannot live in accordance with the dictates of an immovable text (Scripture). Either a way must be found to introduce flexibility into the text, or the text sooner or later will have to be rejected..." (Shaye J.Cohen).

Hence comes the inevitability of Takkanot - the local ordinances/enactments.

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[2] Properly speaking, *who is a Jew* if not a Monotheist of the Biblico-Rabbinical tradition ? Encyclopaedia Britannica views the term from the point of historical background:

"Originally the term **Hebrew** had nothing to do with race or ethnic origin. It derived from *Habiru* - a designation of a class of people who made their living by hiring themselves out for various services. They constituted a multi-ethnic group. The term *Habiru* meaning "Outsiders", was applied to nomads, fugitives, bandits, and workers of inferior status".

In XIII-th century B.C.E. a part of *Habiru* mixed with Ivrim - a larger Babylonian tribe which sprang from Mesopotamia [and included Aramaeans and Chaldeans]. As a result of merger, ancient *Israelites* arose in Canaan (who subsequently mixed with Canaanites as well).

Old rabbis frequently suspended or set aside/bypassed certain Biblical laws, when the times or conditions demanded, to keep them applicable to a changing, more complex society. They disregarded the laws which conflicted with life or health, and enacted many new ordinances not found in the Bible, changing older practices. "Even some Biblical rites and ceremonials were altered by the Rabbis when, because of changed conditions in some place or era, they conflicted with the Mosaic fundamental and immutable commandments of righteousness...

If a specific Biblical ceremonial or rule ceases being righteous in some new conditions or circumstances, then it must be circumvented, at times temporarily..." (Rabbi Moshe Ish-Horowicz)

As Maimonides stated, "in an emergency any Be'th Din (rabbinic court) may cancel even the words of the Written Torah... If they see a temporary need to set aside a positive precept or to transgress a Biblical injunction in order to strengthen religion or to save many Israelites from grief in other matters, the Rabbis may act in accordance with the needs of the time"... And not only the Rabbinic courts but also individual, renowned Rabbis/judges legislated according to need and circumstance. "If even the Biblical laws can be suspended, the more so should Rabbinic laws be changed, cancelled or suspended to save Judaism and the Jews" (Moshe Ish-Horowicz).

"The laws fixed by one assembly of rabbis, could be repealed, if necessary, by another group. As a Rabbinic law modified the Biblical law, so a <u>new</u> Rabbinic law modified an older Rabbinic law" (rabbi Simon Glustrom).

According to Rambam, a contemporary Be'th Din which disagrees with a ruling of an earlier, even greater Rabbinic Court, may make its own ruling which will then be binding. "As long as there is little reason and justification, it does not matter uprooting even the Biblical rules" (Tosefta to Yevamoth 88a)

As rabbi Moshe Ish-Horowicz points out, the rules of the Halakha may be suspended, amended and eased *in times of emergency and need*, in cases of *danger to life*, for the sake of peace with Gentiles and peace at home, to avoid pain and grief, when a financial loss may ensue, and for alleviating poverty, to preserve human dignity, if the majority of the community cannot abide by such a rule, etc.

A local custom overrides a conflicting Halakha (Talmud). In times of old, rabbis enquired how ordinary people acted or behaved in particular situations in order to establish the rules in accordance with popular customs. In fact, many customs never prescribed by the Torah, prevailing in Jewish communities, were observed and sometimes abolished a Law...

"Through the power of interpretation the Jews were able to free themselves from the laws of the Torah which they found difficult, unethical, harsh or unreasonable..." (Prof. Shaye J. Cohen).

The law must develop together with the world, society, human understanding.
If observance of non-vital, obsolete, meaningless Mitzvot and unjust or cruel rituals creates *hardships* to people, we may treat them with lenience and flexibility: the laws and commandments were given to help us to live, not suffer. "One does not decree something on the public which the majority cannot endure..." (Bava Batra, 60-b).

As Rambam states,"the decisions of the Torah is not vengeance on the people, but mercy, kindness and peace in the community."

"Those elements of Halakhah which contradict the moral conscience of Judaism, can be changed." (R.Biale)

If Shemittah, the law of Jubilee, Terumah, Maaser, Halah, observance of Rosh-Hodesh or Tu-bi-Shevat, etc. are not halakhically obligatory for the Jewry living outside Eretz Israel (and the majority of modern Israelites is either indifferent to religion),-- then many other Biblical and rabbinical laws and commandments could be treated the same way.

Rabbi Moshe Ish-Horowicz again points out that, since the Torah is no longer in Heaven (Bava Metzia,59-b) and neither a Heavenly Voice nor visions of prophets can now establish the Halakhah (Eruvin,13-b; Deut.17:9), "the Rabbis alone have both the authority and obligation to make the necessary Halakhic reforms, to legislate, to change, by-pass, suspend or abandon any Halakhot which

become unrighteous, and to add a new righteous rules and meaningful observances, if and when advisable...

Instead of shedding crocodile tears over the fate of Agunot and over the instances of unrighteousness and suffering in this world, they should fulfill their duty. The Divine will is *to put righteousness into practice*..."

Now, before we approach to more detailed survey analysis of the Scriptures, here is an important perspective in our relation to a traditional religions:

After all historical catastrophes, today “it is no longer morally, ethically or religiously acceptable for Israel to be governed by a rigid Orthodox interpretation of Halakhah (Jewish law) which continues to be narrowly exclusive, rather than inclusive" (rabbi Steven Jacobs}.
"The world can no longer afford the luxury of unquestioning faith - which is pagan faith. Unquestioning faith is a nearly universal characteristic of religions throughout the world. All forms of religion have asked the followers to sacrifice their will and surrender themselves to higher reality. And a faith that asks for a total surrender of will is finally not only pagan but demonic, even if it is faith in Jesus or the God of Jesus, for all such faith is a training ground for fanaticism...
The only authentic faith is a questioning faith, a faith prepared to call even God into question. The difference between God and the idol is that idols will brook no dissent. The test of authentic faith is the possibility of a dissent against all authority in the name of a human dignity which reflects the image of God..." (Darrell J. Fasching)

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VI) ACUTE NECESSITY of REFORM :
* * * RE-INTERPRETATION, REVISION, RECONSTRUCTION * * *

Rabbi Milton Steinberg taught: adherents of any religion are obliged, using to the best the advantages of their belief, to eliminate its shortcomings, to correct its faults.

If we want to prevent the Bible/Torah from turning into a mere poetical/literary relict, it needs revision, if not qualified transformation into some adapted version devoid of archaisms, irrelevant laws, legends, many Hukkim (some claim that 2/3 of all Mitzvot have no reasonable meaning today).

Biblical texts may be interpreted on the basis of new knowledge, new experience and revelations. The Torah contains the anachronisms which cannot be interpreted allegorically within the concrete historical context of their writing, and which may be omitted without any loss.

Mythological elements change the character of the Torah, belittle the Mitzvot, prevent the Scriptures from being an instructive, living guide.

If the religious authorities care about preservation of religion, certain elements and issues of Torah, which make it hardly acceptable for modern consciousness, should be reconsidered. For example, the alleged Supernatural Miracles, as follows:

The wife of Lott turns into the pillar of salt on leaving Sodom and Gomorrah...

Avraam cuts sacred animals, and a flame appears in-between (magic, occultism)...

Joshua stops sun and moon...

Jordan river gives way to Joshua's team, then to Eliyahu and Elisha...

Eliyahu is fed by the crows, he makes tricks with a flour and oi1, resurrects the dead boy and provokes heavenly fire and the rain...

Finally Eliyahu goes to the skies (that gives ground for Christians to claim that Jesus also ascended into heaven)...

A small Israelites’ detachment combats with an enemy's army ten times bigger (Judges 7:22)...

Jeriho wonder (it might be explained as natural phenomenon, the same as the burning bush, crossing the Reed Sea, the Cloud of light and smoke over the Israelites, the Mannah; Moshe having extracted water from the. rock, etc.

Elisha stops Assyrian army with a heaven's help, makes tricks with an empty jugs and oil, animates the dead boy...

Samson draws mystic power from his hair and destroys a huge building...

Egyptian plagues [Exod.7,8,9,10]- some of which might be explained as a natural phenomena...

Moshe directs a battle with his hands and performs wonders by his magic rod, like an illusionist [Ex. 4]...

Moshe's copper Serpent heals those bitten by snakes...

Aaron's baton blossoms...

Korah falls into Hell [after a quarrel with communal authorities]...

An ass speaks to Balaam...

Solomon understands the language of birds and animals...

Jonah is swallowed by a whale and happily got out...

Three Jewish boys in Persia remain safe in a furnace and Daniel remains safe in a row with the lions [Dan. 3, 6]...

What were some "urim and tumim", if not a sort of occultism ?

And can we admit fantastic longevity of ancient Biblical characters (Gen. 5-11) ?..

Now let's consider some basic concepts of the Bible/Tanakh:

An alleged mythical Creation of the world and the man 6 thousand years ago (while our Universe might emerge over 12 billion years ago, and the first men appeared over 400 thousand years ago, if not a million...

"God created them - a man and a woman..." (Ber. I). But thereafter, in Bere'shit II: "God said: it's not good for a man to be alone, and He created for him a wife [from the man's part]..."

If those are two different versions of Genesis, could it be real *God's Word* ?...

"God created a man after His image and likeness (Ber. I). What does it mean, if no one ever saw Him ?.. God has no anthropomorphic features, no image/appearance whatsoever, nor definition, otherwise it is just an Idol ! "Who is similar to You, o King !" (*Shmone Esreh*; Is.40:18). If the man [so poorly constructed] reflects/ resembles God's image, then God may also possess negative qualities !.. Perhaps, the concept of man's likeness to God means that a man contains inner microcosm similar to Macrocosm of Universe, possesses vast potential, and that a man is also a creator...

Unfortunately, the latest 6000 years of human history alone let us doubt about that ancient mythical picture of man's creation: after whose image and likeness - of God's (Higher Reason), or of an ape ?...

Remember Gan Eden; angels; the Serpent and mystical Trees of Knowledge and Life; man's expulsion from Paradise [could God prohibit a man to taste from "the trees of Knowledge of good and evil", making him infantile, not discriminating things, nor acquiring wisdom ?]\3...

Remember a sea monster Rahav and the heavenly superhuman beings ("the sons of God") who married the daughters of men (Gen.VI)...

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[3] Possible interpretations of the Tree of Life or the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil:

Some scholars believe that, when properly translated, the Tree of Life is the same with the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil. That means that Life includes both good and bad, and man's living involves the knowledge of good and evil. Many things in equal degree may serve as a sources of both good and evil, creation and destruction. In Gan Eden God gave humankind the First Lesson: Don't touch, don't taste what is forbidden, otherwise you'll be thrown out to the bottom of life and will suffer...

Another interpretation: Those who shall try to approach/touch the sources of Life/Energy and use them, they will *know* the difference between good and evil on themselves...

One more exegesis: Not every knowledge is necessary for the man, so avoid unhealthy/ harmful experience !...

Perhaps we may read Genesis 2:17 simply as "the Tree of the knowledge of evil". Thus, the first Mitzvah of Tanakh (the Bible) is **to abstain from Evil** of any sort.

Could Noah save in his ship/ark many animals, and was that great flood really world-wide or rather a regional calamity ?.

S.M.Dubnov, Abba Hillel Silver and others claimed that the first chapters of Genesis up to the 11th resemble ancient Pagan myths, apparently of Mesopotamian-Sumerian origin.

How could God literally speak to Biblical characters in a human voice ? [Jer.23:18]...

And the notion of a *tribal* "God of Israel" sounds as absurdly as "Christian God", or as "Old Testament for Jews" [Is.61:11; 66:18; Jer.9:25; Joel 2:32; Zech.9:1; 14:9; Mal.2:10]

*** * * On the strange sacrificial cult :**

Weren't all those tabernacle/temple sacrifices, scapegoats etc. a Heathen cult of a primitive historical stage, inherited from Babylon and Canaan ? True God could never call Moses to make offerings as claimed in Exodus 20:24 (remember Isaia 1:11-17; 66:3)...

Weren't the Mosaic sacrifices of the first-borns of a harvest (Maaser, T'rumah, Hala), as well as the animals a prejudice and a harmful selection (Exodus 34), the remnant of ancient pagan practices ? How could one bring as an offering for his personal sins another living beings [Mic.6:7] ? True sacrifice means getting out of sins, bringing to altar all the worst in the man. So it would be proper to sacrifice rather unclean, faulty, sick animals and birds, rotten fruit, etc.

Didn't Avraam make a grave mistake being ready to sacrifice his first-born Yitzhak for the sake of some inadequate idea or vision, an obsession ? Avraam terrified, shocked his son and quickened death of his wife Sarrah who could not bear such a pagan way of "testing"... That act - "Give Me the first-borns of your sons" [Ex.22:29, 30] was typical of Canaanean cult... [Jer.19:5] And that gives grounds to suppose that the first monotheist in the Biblical narrative was Moses, not an immigrant shepherd Avraam (at best, Avraam worshipped the Canaanite supreme God El)...

True God could never suggest that to Avraham, that was self-deception ! No sacrifice atones sins (Jeremiah 7:22, 31; I Kings 15:22; Mic.6:6-8). "Binding of Isaak was immoral and devastating act, corruption of ideal... Our children need not be sacrificed in the pursuit of our goals (J.Kleiman, mag. "Reconstructionist 1993).

"That was not God's will but Avraham's *guilt* which unconsciously demanded to atone for his sin before Ishmael..."(H.Feiner, ibid.)

Similar mistake made Jephtah who killed his daughter just because he "made a vow to God"(!)...

Human perception is imperfect. Wrong understanding, interpretation of "inner voice", one's intuition, often brings mistakes and bad consequences. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, - says God, - your ways are not My ways" (Is.55:8)...

So it is an strange, depressing belief that after the Temple restoration, Mosaic sacrifices will be resumed again... Yet God might destroy that Temple just as the kind of idolatry [Is. 66:1; Jer. 7:11], God does not require ritual sacrifices, rather He needs our constructive work, positive efforts, good deeds (see Mk.12:33)...

There are many difficult questions arising from the Torah study. Just mention some of them without any systematization or scholar analysis.

Did Jacob really fought God at Jabbok river, or it was rather some imaginary primitive deity, a demon, false god, if not a subconscious fear ?..

Why the Bible pretends that God was against counting an Israeli, people - a men's prejudice ?..

A descriptions of production of the Holy Ark and the Tabernacle - was that God's Word either?..

Even much less resemble the God's Word the books of Joshua Ben-Nun, the Judges, the Chronicles, the chapters 1-5, 10 and 37 of Ezekiel, the Book of Daniel, the chapters 1-6 of Zecharia, pagan lyrics of the Song of songs, while excluded from the Bible were the Wisdom of Solomon, the Books of Ben-Sirah, Toviah, Baruch and Maccabees...

Could God ever say what was claimed in the Exodus 3:21-22; 11:2; 12:35-36; 23:27-31; 32:27... or in the Numbers 15:35; 25:17, or in Genesis 15:18-21; 17:10-14, or in the Joshua 6:1; 8:1, or in the Esther 8:11; 9:13,16; or in Isaiah 11:14; or in Deuteronomy 2:24-25; 7:1-2; 9:1,3 ???...

Example: HaShem commanded: “You will plunder the Egyptians” (you see the difference: one thing is to take action against Pharaoh, another thing- to take action against the whole foreign people)...

The Bible tolerates polygamy and concubines, and accepts slavery, though all that is not God's law...

In Rabbinic Judaism women have a lower status than men (Yoma 66; Shabb.33; Ket.59; Pes.65; Sot.21); a traditional Minyan doesn't count women (remember the Jewish blessing “Thank You that You have not made me a woman")...

The Bible prescribes: don't work on a first-born ox, don’t cut/shear the first-born cattle (Deut.15)..»

Break the neck of a first-born donkey (Ex. 34), slaughter a one-year old heifer (Deut.21)...

Don't plough on both donkey and ox at once...

Boil not a goatling’s flesh in milk...

Ashes of a red heifer are prescribed as purification from the dead body (Num. 19)...

Ruining nests: take away nestlings (though Rambam said, it's a senseless mitzvah)

Marry your sister-in-law, if your brother dies (Ibbum - levirate marriage)... Remember the immoral laws of Halitza and Agunah...

The Torah advocates marriage of cousins, i.e. incest, though Lev.18 warns: "None approach yourself to any relative by flesh"- that has bad genetic consequences for the offspring...

Talmud (Yev. 62-6) recommends marriage on "the daughter of your sister", a niece, which is also an incest!...

The Bible is for condescension for a beating a pregnant woman (and hurting or killing a to-be-born foetus), instead of death/life sentence or a heaviest possible penalty (including castration)...

For the rape, marriage was prescribed, not death or a heaviest possible punishment (an insulting mitzvah!)...

Pre-marital sex was not prohibited by the Bible either...

Extra-marital affair of a married man with a single woman isn't considered a crime, while that of a married woman is a capital offence. An adulteress must be divorced, while an adulterer may remain married...

The Bible prescribes testing a suspected woman in faithfulness by bitter water (Num.5), a strange treatment of leprosy (Lev.13,14), a death penalty for non-respect/cursing of parents and to a rebellious son (Deut.21:18), and it approves the law/practice of Nazir...

*** * * More problematic issues of the Torah** follow :

Cut not your hair and beard (Lev.19:27), especially during the year of mourning; wear ear-locks (anachronism)...

Women are not allowed to wear trousers (Deut. 22:5)...

Numerous fantastic Halakhic Shabbat taboos and limitations are hardly applicable in a modern world. Why are a car driving or going by train, or switching the light, shaving, cooking, phoning, cleaning or repairing one’s house, washing, shopping prohibited ?.. Why not to help your family in homework or shopping this day, if you lack time on weekdays ? Why not to entertain all together, if "Shabbat was given for joy"?..

Important is to dedicate this day to your home, family, friends, Nature, generate positive attitude...

Why it was prohibited to arrange marriages on Shabbat ?..

What's more important - to read and discuss on Kabbalat Shabbat the weakly Torah portions (from Pentateuch/Tanakh) in a traditional succession, or – rather selectively, only those chapters which are actual, combining them with what do they prefer for a specific situation ?..

Why drinking of undiluted wine on Shabbat and holidays is allowed for children ? Why 4 glasses of wine were prescribed on Pe'sach and Tu-bi-Sh'vat, and even more on Purim ? They forget that Rambam forbade drinking any sort of wine by young people... Possibly, the explanation is found in a Talmud saying: "All wine that is not diluted with one-third of water, is not wine" (Eruvin 29).

Can't a congregation shift celebration of a holiday to the near favorable day, subject to bad weather (cold, storm, excessive heat, heavy rain, hurricane), or an epidemic, etc.? And those who under certain reasons (medical, economical, family, etc.) and some obstacles can't visit a synagogue/havurah, may celebrate at home – why not ?..

* * * Other **disputable Mitzvot and practices** :

Shaatnaz (do not wear clothes from both flax and wool)...
Prohibition of leather shoes on certain occasions (Kohanim aren't allowed to wear shoes at the altar), ban on cutting beard and hair, on bathing and washing clothes 3 weeks before 9-th Av, as well as washing one's mouth during the fast, drinking water and washing one's face on Rosh ha-Shanah...
Observance of Jubilee (Yovel) and Saturday (Shemita) years...
Pidyon ha-Ben (based on irrelevant Exod. 13:2)...
Lulav; pouring water on the altar during Sukkot, living in a Sukkah|4, beating with *aravah* against the floor...
Kaparah (rotating a cock over one's head) – the remnant of a barbaric pagan sacrificial cult...
Eating an egg with ashes before 9-th Av fast...
Counting Omer...
Hametz (with its sale to Gentiles and the return after Pe'sach).
Orlah... Eruv...
B'rahot on washing hands, putting-on a new clothes, on T'filin and Tzitzit, on every natural phenomenon, on reading the Torah, etc...
Leaving a glass of water in the home after a funeral...
Mehitzah... Niddah testing...
Traditional Mikvah (it was actual in the Temple period, pertaining to the purity laws)...
Orthodox Kashrut (Avraam, Yitzhak and Jacov did not practice it)...
Tallit and head covering (a kipah)- both were not worn until the Middle ages, perhaps they represent a legacy of Arab Khalifat); Kapot (oriental dressing-gown); a fur hat; women's wig (with a shaven head); T'filin, Mezuzah (a sort of amulet), tzitzit (the Bible prescribes a blue thread within a tzitzit, but when a blue dye disappeared, the rabbis abolished that element)...
T'filin, Tallit, Tzitzit, Mezuzah and other routine Orthodox attributes should not be imposed categorically...

Now a bit of a "**sacred history**" misunderstood by many believers...

Who proved that the world was created on "Rosh ha-Shana" (on Friday) and not on "Christmas "day ?..
Jewish mythical chronology "from the world Creation" was adopted only since the X-XII centuries, is it historically and scientifically adequate (5784 etc.) ??...

Deuteronomy 20 prohibits killing of captured women and children, and rabbi Bertinoro said: "A king possessing himself, won't upon seizing a town, execute the remaining rebels being in his hands."

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[4] A doubt: Jewish nomads could hardly live in the booths in wilderness due to the lack of a necessary materials...

But Moshe, Joshua ben-Nun and the king David violated that Mitzvah and did many brutal actions, including the use of furnaces, threshers, saws, frying pans against their enemies (Josh. 6:20; 7:24, 25; 8:24-26; Joshua 10:28-40; Josh.11; I Kings 15:3)...
After introducing the 10 Commandments, Moses, in the name of his tribal lord Yahweh- called to harsh cruelty towards Canaanite folks (Deut.7:16, 20:16; Num.25:17): "Cursed are they, don't have mercy for them, destroy them; in their towns which are given to you, leave no single soul alive..." (the same slogan by Zechariah 12:6)!

Military treatment of captured cities, including women and property, was terrible, brutal (Exodus 23:23,24,27-33; 34:10,12,13; Deuter. 2:33-34; 3:6 ; 20:13-18; Joshua 11:14; 10:30 etc.). Were those occupation and Genocide ordained by some tribal G-d Yhwh (Numbers 31:17; 33:50-55) ?... Moses commanded: "Kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that has known man..."

Could the "elected God's People" do such misanthropic things ??.. Could God give vile commandments at all (Deut. 23:19-20; 28:12; Isaia 60:10-12) ??...

To wage a "holy war" against mass depravity and moral degradation does not mean to destroy the cities and exterminate the civilian population... Was such an aggression out of "fear of or disdain for the way of life of the settled agricultural and urban peoples- the Canaanites" (Encyclopaedia Britannica) ?..

Couldn't all that be a justification for subsequent Christian and Moslem crusades ?...

How is it possible to celebrate "merry Purim" - the Day of the first Pogrom, mass massacre of over 75'000 Persians - as a significant popular religious festival ?...

Isn't eating "Haman's ears" on Purim a sort of a twisted psychological cannibalism ?..

As compared to Moshe, Joshua ben-Nun and king David, prophet Mohammad tried to abstain from violence even towards the enemies. Before the battles he suggested to his warriors that they did not attempt on life of women, children and those who surrender at their will, nor pursued those running from battle field, that they were merciful towards captives, and did not hurt fields and gardens of the conquered land...

Just opposite to the instructions of that fanatic priest Mosis...

Deuteronomy 13:5 and 17:2 on the IDOLATRY: "If someone serves another gods and worships them, as well as sun, moon and the stars, stone him to death..." (also Numb.25:4, 5; Levit.20:27; Deut.13:8, 15).

Moses ordered one man to be stoned to death just because of carrying firewood/sticks on *Shabbat* (Numb.15:35), and then he ordered Levites to murder 3000 Jewish worshippers of a golden calf (instead of expelling them from the community): "Each of yours kill your brother, your friend, your neighbor !.." (Exod.32:37) [but he left safe his brother Aaron who made that calf]...

Perhaps that was the reason why God did not let Moses enter the Promised Land: with his extremism he violated the important Mitzvah not to kill (Exod.20:13).

Biblical Pinchas [translates as the black- a negro?] killed a man who wished to marry a non-Jewess: if he could, that Pinchas would had gladly killed also Abraham, Joseph, Judah, Moshe, kings David and Shlomo, princess Esther and many other Israelites for the same reason...

Yet Talmud says: "Peace is so much important that even if Israelites worship idols but are in peace one with another, the Law does not punish them..."

Cruelty and violence is no remedy against idolatry. If we define IDOLATRY in a broader sense - as *mental blindness, narrow-mindedness and cultivation of illusions*, we'd come to realize the **Golden Rules Against any sort of Idolatry**:

1. No excesses, extremes, no idealization, deification of whatever; be careful about "*isms*" and generalizations.

Do not turn anything into a cult: neither goods/belongings, nor one's person, nor theories,

2. Don’t let anything or anyone hypnotize, possess and subjugate you, suppress or paralyze your will,

3. Don't give in to illusions. Attach importance to things not more than is needed, neither exaggerate and complicate, nor belittle and simplify anything; avoid narrow fragmentary view/outlook/perception...

See the Essence behind the forms, appearance, show... See General behind the particular and the particular within the general... See the Whole...

4. Distinguish between the means/instrument and the purpose...

5. Focus on actual, necessary matters...

6. There's a proper time and a proper place for everything...

The modem ugly troglodite culture parasitizes on one primitive side/aspect of our nature, plays on (exploits) low emotions and base instincts and fancies, but denies Wholeness/ Entirety of the man and the world.

Any arts is illusive, false and limited, it fixes artificially on several moments, some detail of life, one part of the man, concentrates on outward aspects of phenomena, not on the entity of things... Arts is a microscopic and transient part of reality, which may easily turn into the people’s opium... Life surpasses all arts, cinema, TV, theatrical performances, mass-media and entertainments - the same as God is much greater than any religion... Herein lies the boarder between Monotheistic and the Heathen cultures.

* * * Here are **some more difficult points of Mosaic teachings :**

Should a certain set time for the prayer be established: 2-3 times a day, as prescribed by the rabbis, or one may pray only in time of the need, without a traditional routine order: spontaneously, without schedule and formulae, when self-control is required, or when we are in despair or under a stress ?.. What is more helpful - prayer or singing and a good music ?...

In pre-rabbinic times the prayers were not regulated/fixed by special times or certain patterns, and the ancient rabbis initially believed that the Torah study was more important than the prayer ["Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him"...(Math.6:8)]

In a sense, "prayer is a form of exercise [*self-tuning*] which serves the purpose of spiritual fitness, just as physical exercise serves the purpose of physical fitness" (rabbi J.Rayner).

As Dennis Prager put it, God does not need our prayer - we ourselves need it. True prayer is not a petition, but a cry for help, not mere hoping that God makes/arranges everything at your request... A prayer works because the man appeals to his own inner Cosmos, and it responds...
In this respect we may omit all inadequate traditional texts of prayers: for the rain and the dew (a kind of sorcery, shamanism), for the coming of Mashiah, for the restoration of the Temple in Yerushalayim and resumption of sacrifices, for being “the light to the nations” (nationalism or supremacism), for resurrection of the dead, for return of all Israel to Zion, etc.
The technique/practice of a prayer may vary up to people and situations...

It's quite natural to conduct congregational services on Shabbat nearest to the new and/or full moon, instead of each calendar Shabbat running...

* * * More relevant questions * * *

Can a priest forgive man's sins, if a man himself must atone them ? Is blessing a prerogative of a clergyman or God ?..

Should Tzedaka (alms) be given to every beggar, or just to those who deserve it ? [since begging is often turned into profession]... The first subject of charity is one's own family.

We may be altruistic to those who show similar feelings... Why to "love your neighbor as yourself" literally (Lev.19:18; Math.22:39) ? Should we love and make friends with all and everybody,

or just simply treat others as an equal (without arrogance or self-abasement), just cooperate on the basis of **reciprocity** ?.. Can everybody be trusted ?...

As pastor John Melin put it, people may be considered our brothers and sisters, while this doesn't automatically mean that we all are best friends...

What is "Original sin" ? Children inherit their ancestors' properties: bad character, aggressiveness, or shyness, drinking habits, sexual abuses, criminal inclinations, genetic defects/lesions, etc. All the "past" qualities accumulate in the man from the start and are hard to correct... In other words, this is called one's *Karma*...

Talmud advocates premature marriage for boys at 14-18 and girls since 12-13. Can that obsolete medieval (or Babylonian) practice be accepted by medical and economical reasons ?..

Orthodox authorities don't allow family planning (birth-control). "Be fruitful and multiply" is not a Mitzvah, but a natural law [as Rambam said, the Scriptures describe real Nature). Our Mitzvah is to find an appropriate partner...

Talmud prescribes frequent "conjugal duty", without a connection to the moon's phases and general health...

Not all sex perversions are banned by the Torah: nudism, onanism, lesbians, seducement of children, porno/ erotic, etc. There misses a clear formulation of a Mitzvah to avoid any sort of self-stimulation/ excitation/ gratification [physical, visual, mental] which is risky to mental state, retards person's development, impedes learning ability, kills proper live motivations and man's creativity: it is similar to a short-circuit in a battery. Uncontrolled sex passion is as destructive as non-isolated electrical wire, and leads to loss/waste of life energy (see Numb.15:39; Proverbs 25:28; Ezek.11:21; Math.5:29-30; Luke 11:34).

And besides, worship of a human body, instincts and pleasure is idolatry. So, self-control is the only guarantee to remain Homo Sapiens amid brute animal world and aggressive species...

There's no comments in the Torah on narcotics, smoking and bad habits, on anti-social behavior, no special concern for health, hygiene, exercises (remember a strange prescriptions in Prov.27:10; 31:6,7; Eccles.3:9)….

The traditional Scriptures contain enough strange advises: "Don't keep angry dog at home"; "Flies, fleas and mosquitoes are useful"(Talmud), then what about bugs, ticks, louses, cockroaches ?.. [not to mention quite a stupid "commandment" in Deut. 25:11 or equally stupid rabbinical opinion in Talmud, *Yoma* 88-a...

Is living in *Eretz* Israel a "*Mitzvah* of superior importance" ?

The Bible says: souls of fornicators will be dismissed from Israel and eternally condemned (Deut.23:17; Isaiah 60:21). Ramban: "Eretz does not hold wicked people"...

But as we see, prostitution in Israel exists so well as it existed since the times of famous Rahav, and homosexuals as well, and mafia too [Israel became a paradise for dirty money laundering, for fugitives|5 and slave trade], political and religious corruption, as well as local Nazism... - the same vices and crimes inherent in many other countries (not talking about a polluted environment)...

Many native residents are inimical towards newcomers (*olim*); there's hatred between different *hassidic* courts, conflict between Orthodox and Liberal Jews, alienation between a religious and secular communities, between *Ashkenazim* and *Sefardim*, etc.

It seems, geographical Israel never was a spiritual center for the world Jewry. "Despite our theological ruminations, Jews even after the *Shoah*, choose to live in Western democratic secular states as equal partners with non-Jews" (Marc Ellis).

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[5] The practice of hiding and protecting fugitives in Israel was foreordained in the Tanakh - is it divine justice or **mafia law** ?..

What is yet superior - a place or the people, community ? To avoid the cult of the land (which belongs to God), it's worth remembering Joshua 24:13 and Psalm 23:1. "Judaism is more tied to Time than to the land" (Ernst Simon)...

Why king David prophesied nude, as well as Isaiah (Is.20:2) ? Talmud says: "None is so nasty for God, as that who goes nude before everybody's eyes"...

Jeremiah warned us [Jer.14:14; 23:16,32]: "Says the Lord: Don't listen to prophets, they deceive you and tell the false dreams of their heart", people conceive a Divine revelations with distortions [Ezek.13:6,7].

That's why "a **wise man is better than a prophet**" [Talmud, Baba Batra 12; Jer.23:11,18]...

* *

The above list of issues is not exhaustive, it gives general hints and orientation for further explorations.

Following the principle of criticism out of sympathy, for the sake of religious survival, shouldn't we be wise to separate the weeds from the wheat, disregarding in our sacred texts [if not omitting/eliminating from them] everything irrelevant which has no meaning and use whatsoever, and to preserve what **is** relevant and universally applicable ? "Though the actual doing of Jewish practice may not change from previous experience, the "*whys*" and "*wherefores*" of such doing must be grounded in a *new foundation*, beginning with a new understanding of the core bases of Judaism..." (r. Steven Jacobs)

As they say, new wine needs a renewed wineskins (Mark 2:22)...

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* * * Examples of INDIVIDUAL PRAYERs :

[as a way of self-control]

1

O God, the Lord Almighty, our Cosmic Father,
Please forgive and purify me,
Improve me ;
Let me bring to Your altar all the worst in me ;
Strengthen my mind ;
Heal me, sustain and protect me ;
Let nothing and no one affect, subjugate and hurt me ;
Let me withstand self-destruction- spiritual and physical ;

Let me choose between Evil *and* Good in this world,
between Sin *and* Sanity,
between Decay *and* Health,
Dirt *and* Purity,
Meanness *and* Decency ;
between the lower, primitive, animal *and* the Higher, developed, Human;
between Ignorance *and* Culture,
Folly *and* Responsibility ;
between Death, Destruction, Degradation *and* Life, Creation, sacred Energy;
between Harmful *and* Useful ;
between Falsehood *and* Truth, illusions *and* Reality ;
between idleness, emptiness *and* Labor…

Let me *distinguish* the main things from the minor ones...
Help me to bear pain and suffering,
not be tired of beginning everything anew ;
to make decisions and solve my problems,
while being helpful to others ;

Give me courage and determination to struggle with my weaknesses/shortcomings and the obstacles of everyday's living, to become the master, not slave...

Prolong the wonder of Life for us,
Reveal the wonders of Spirit and Reason in this mad world...

Amen.

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2

My God is Truth...

Reason, Prudence, Sound Judgment, Discernment, Understanding -
these are my help and shield...

My temple is my Family, my Ancestors, and Friends...

Let me remember my roots and respect others...

My nationality is what I am...

My religion is a necessary *Work*...

May good deeds be my worship...

My commandments are Common Sense, Willpower, Health and Knowledge,
decent way of life...

My Policy is *Ordnung*, Justice, opposition to bestiality and Chaos...

Let me avoid unnecessary forms, empty words and rites ;

May my thoughts be adequate, speech correct, and deeds - useful...

Let me become better than I am !

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Appendix

*** * * Examples of a possible Takkanot (local ordinances/enactments/rulings)**

1. According to the Torah, the Lord said:

"I am Who/What I am", "My thoughts are not your thoughts, your ways are not My ways..."
According to Talmud, “May they forget/desert Me, says God, as long as they keep My Torah (laws)..." According to Rambam, "Man's deeds are in his own hands, the Most High does not compel/force him and does not decide for him which way to act..."
"Woe to the person who identifies God with any of His attributes !" (Zohar)

Hence:
Judaism doesn't so much postulate/assert a definite image/ identity of a certain God, as it testifies and warns against idolatry, false gods, aiming at adequate perception and positive actions of man, at improvement of human relationships, rather than at theological doctrines... IMHO
Jacob (Israel) who fought with God, remained independent of any deity and "spirit", rather curbed it. And rabbi Joshua said: “We do not heed Heavenly voices, for the majority of wise men is to be followed...” (Baba Metzia 59)
Not without reason Jewish tradition forbids the use/uttering of the very word *God*, to avoid making the cult out of it. G-d is what He is - not how we imagine Him/It...
To comprehend Him is as difficult as to see the Whole of Life in all aspects, all realms, the Whole of reality, the Whole of truth... (remember Job 9:11; 11:7; 23:8 and John 1:18)...
The main meaning and purpose of the God-idea is to fight with the false/ inadequate, incomplete notion/ conception of reality, with myths, illusions and dogmatism, never turn anything into the CULT or the end and purpose in itself|6, nor to lose a sense of proportion, and to be able to transcend everything insignificant...

Fear of God actually means avoidance of idolatry. God is called to liberate a man from false deification, from self-deceit/delusion and mania, helping the man to re-focus his mind correctly...
We should refrain from idolizing and idealization of any sort, from the fetish/Absolute-making, neither giving an exaggerated (hypertrophied) attention, nor attaching an excessive importance to any particular elements, phenomenon, superficial form, never becoming a slave of anything, keeping in mind various aspects of living...
Idolatry dominates/prevails over the Whole (of reality), hypnotizing us, making us dependent on what we worship [John 8:34], distorting our view (Weltanschauung), making our perception fragmentary...
When you are obsessed with some emotion or *idee fixe*, by fanaticism, when you emphasize negative qualities of people with whom you have to live, when you make a Problem out of everything, - all these are the kinds of idolatry...
The most dramatic problem of any religion is: whether God may be an Object of worship and petition, or only an INSTRUMENT protecting us from idolatry, the means/ attribute of true knowledge and right conduct ?...

As D.Prager and rabbi J.Telushkin put it, "It’s important for a man to live so and behave so, AS IF God exists, even if he doubts about God's existence..."

2. According to the Torah, God said:

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[6] be it: goods, money, food, sex, human body, appearance, pleasure, fantasies, arts, TV, cinema, theater, fashion, music, advertising, sports, animals, entertainment, temples, priests, rituals, prayers, mantras, sacred objects/images and places, saints and prophets, saviors and messiahs, Shabbat and holidays, some land, nation, language, symbols, words, names, the titles, kings, leaders, the state, parties, sects, rebbe/Pope/mullah, Scriptures, teachings, theories, etc.

“Do to Babylon as she has done to others. Repay her for her deeds...” (Jeremiah 50:15,29)

"Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, damage for damage, soul for soul [a life for a life]” (Ex.21:23-25).

"If one has come to kill you, rise and kill him first (Sanhedrin 72a)...

According to rabbi Hillel, "Don't do to others what is hateful to yourself [what you wouldn't have others do to you]" (Shabbat 31).

“In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you either...” (Math.7:2; Talmud, Sanhedrin 100)

Hence - we may expand the Sinaitic Commandments in a spirit of **reciprocity**, as follows:

You’ll not murder, and don't let anyone kill you...
You’ll not commit adultery, and don't let anyone seduce/corrupt you...
You'll not steal, and don't let anyone rob you...
You'll not give false testimony against your neighbor, and don't let anyone slander you...
You'll not covet stranger's property, and don't allow anyone make attempt on your property...
You’ll not defraud your neighbors, and don’t let people defraud you as well...
All that means: don't hurt others - and also don't let others disturb and harm you,
TREAT PEOPLE so AS THEY TREAT YOU (for the sake of justice)...

3. Talmud says: Danger to human life and health, or illness *abrogate all Mitzvot.*

Ben Maimon taught: “It’s impossible to study and understand the teaching while being hungry or ill.”

The rabbis said: "No money/no flour (meal) – hence no Torah"...

"All Torah study without worldly occupation/work comes to nought [is futile] and leads to sin..." (Pirkei Avot 2:2).

"He who occupies himself with the Torah alone, is like one without God, for there are also the duties of service and benevolence"... (Avodah Zarah 17).

"**Greater than one who fears God, is the man who lives by his labor**..." (Berahot 80).

"If you are busy with some work, and you are told that Mashiah has come, first finish your work, then come to meet Mashiah... (Talmud)

"It is worthier to shelter the wayfarer than to welcome God..." (Shabbat 127).

“If you have a sapling in your hand, and they tell you that King Messiah has arrived, first plant the sapling and then go out to greet him...” (rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakkai)

Hence logical conclusions and solutions can be drawn:

When there exists a possibility to fall ill or overstrain, or somebody within one’s family is ill; or when the man is urged by a pressing work or a family task; if we are in trouble and under extreme living conditions, suffer hardships and discomfort (including transport problems, bad weather, epidemics, financial and housing problems, etc.) - all that may be a justifiable reason to omit holidays or *Kabbalat Shabbat* and some rituals; as a solution, simplified rites may be performed at home.

In circumstances, when people have to vegetate and survive, then any feast and holiday lose its sense whatever…

Struggle for normal living conditions is one of the paramount Mitzvot for us. We should live by laws and commandments, not die from them. Religion must be for people, *not* people for religion, it should relieve people, *not* burden them !

In this vein, the general approach to religion is clearly visible: “Whoever accepts for himself with devotion even *one Mitzvah*, is worthy of having God’s spirit descend upon him…” (Tanhuma, Besh.14)

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~~ CONCLUSIONS ~~

1. If a religion serves the man *to* enable him/her to survive (not to escape from the world, narcotizing him/her with a false hope, belief, illusion or delusion), if it helps to develop man's responsibility and creative potential, to better, properly manage (deal with) one's own life, - such a religion has chances for existence as a necessary component of human culture.

2. If we are honest to ourselves and faithful to truth, let's not forget that the ultimate goal of both Judaism, Christianity and Islam is not God *per se* in its traditional version, but the controllable and **cultured human nature**.

3. Precondition of the possible inter-religious as well as inter-national and inter-political dialogues might be a following principles:

A) *on the religious plane*: to be a Jew (or a Christian, a Moslem, a Buddhist, a Hindu, etc.) at home, in a family, community, within one's denomination, AND to be a good human being outside a family, community, congregation - in the outer world [religions should not divide and abuse people and create conflicts out of nothing - then they are worthless]...

B) *on the national plane*: to be a Jew, a French, a Georgian, an Ukrainian, Basque, Albanian, a Chechen, Turk, Kazakh, a Romanian, Lett, Kurd, Negro et al at home, in a family/community, BUT to be a worthy human being outside...

C) *on the political plane*: to be a Capitalist, Republican, Tory, a Marxist, Communist, liberal democrat, Zionist, etc. within a certain political sphere/frames, BUT to be a responsible citizen in a broader society...

That means a renunciation of a missionary activity, agitation and self-admiration.
Tribal, ideological separatism of any sect, caste, clan, mafia, or party do scathe to society.
Keep in private your national, religious and party traits and customs, and be aware of common universal values while interconnecting with others...
Neither biological or psychological features, nor nationality, nor religion, nor party affiliation, nor social status should impede people’s relationships, interaction, cooperation.

No people have the right to extol their specific religion or nation or political system, claiming its superiority and exclusivity over the rest of humanity/ society, making cult (and money) out of it and giving indulgences or privileges to themselves as “the Elected ones” (closed elite group). People have only the right to be an *examples* of what they believe in and teach...
Just remember millions of victims of religious wars worldwide, and genocides based on nationality, and the class wars... Social self-identification on no account should be transformed into the supremacy of any groups...

Whatever our nationality, religion/confession, political orientation, social status, likes-and-dislikes, yet our common life objective is being HOMO SAPIENS HABILIS, which is a real God's Word and the *greatest Commandment* of all...

Again, there are no “elected folks”, nor “Light to the nations”, nor ideal religion or political system… We need religion acceptable for most ordinary people, without dogmatism, formalism and unnecessary complications.
It's possible and useful to study and recognize simultaneously Hammurabi, Akhenaton, Zarathushtra, Buddha, Kungfu-tzu, Lao-tzu, Mani, Plato, Socrates, the Torah, the Christian covenant (including non-canonical, apocryphal texts), Islam, Sufi teachings, Bahai, Guru Nanak, J.Krishnamurti, Rudolf Steiner, other prophets, sages and scientists of the world - as the knowledge necessary for the development and self-organization of the man. Accept them not blindly, but reasonably, in moderation:

any religious and ideological system, as a product of time and society, has its imperfections, inconsistencies and should not contradict the Truth.

Truth is never limited to dogmas, canons, rituals, confessions, hierarchies, traditions and theories. Truth is wider, more complex, fuller, has many sides, is universal, understandable without intermediaries and interpreters, is comprehended as a direct Revelation, through analysis and pure perception...

When a balance is reached between faith, reason, intuition. This requires synthesis, combination in organic integrity, taking into account true interests and overcoming false and perverted interests...

Therefore a Middle Way is proposed, reminiscent of the Buddhist one: not just detachment from the world, desires, temptations, consumerism, ideological, religious, national and party dogmas - but ***equidistance*** from all theories, systems and methods, the search for (and choice of) the valuable and useful with a balanced approach, without blind copying, formalism and bigotry.

Follow the MIDDLE WAY, equidistant from all existing theories, methods, ideologies, dogmas, systems, traditions, parties, movements – using the best from all...

Live "*in-between*", as per an ancient Sanskrit definition "**neti-neti**"- neither this, nor that...

As old sages taught:

“Believe nothing just because a so-called wise person (sage) said it.
Believe nothing just because a belief is generally held.
Believe nothing just because it is said in ancient books, or it is said to be of divine origin.
Believe nothing just because someone else believes it.
Believe only what you yourself test and judge to be true...” { Buddha }

“Do agree with me, *if* I seem to you to speak the truth;
or, if not - withstand me might and main, that I may not deceive you as well as myself in my desire and like the bee leave my sting in you..." { Socrates }

No need to overdo it with religious ideas, images, symbols, turning religion into mythology, obsolete cult, historical relic. Fanaticism and dogmatism turn religious adherents into a socially closed group which doesn't contribute to the development of society.

The common goals of any religious system are "right thoughts, proper speech, adequate actions", self-control, and the fight against Evil.

Thus follow nobody but your *guru*, your family/relatives and your inner self...

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/// ^ * * * **Epilogue** * * * ^ \\\

Judaism that we discussed here is rather a hypothetical one.
Real religions reflect views and traditions (mentality) of their adepts and adherents who often don't accept their flaws. For instance, the dogma of national chosenness excludes a possibility of self-criticism, may lead to chauvinism and Nazism of its kind.

The first fault in the concepts of Judaism: was ancient Jewry "God-elected" through swindling and extermination of the Goyim (Exod.3:21-22; Deut.20:16-17), through self-extolling ?…
The same way as Avraam confused hallucinations/illusions/ aberrations of his own mind with the commandment of the Almighty (which cannot take unreasonable form to kill Isaac), God could have never commanded to Moses to rob Egyptians, to seize and occupy Canaan (i.e. carry the light and democracy to the non-elected) and kill Canaanites/Palestinians as the foreign class...

The myth of "Election by God" means both monopoly for truth and special privileged treatment of a certain folk whatever they committed or however behaved.

If the world must be indebted to the "Holy Nation", then could the "elected" on their part respect the non-elected ones and be on equal with others ?..

Remember another revelations: **Exodus 33:5** ; **Isaiah 1:4, 15, 16, 23**; **63:19** ; **Jeremiah 4:22, 5:30-31**; **6:13-15, 30; 7:9; 7:28,29; 19:15; 32:30-32** ; **Ezekiel 36:31-32** ; **Hosea 4:1,2,6-9** ; **Math. 23:31-36** etc.

The status of an ideal *exclusive* nation carrying the Light to the whole illiterate humanity, is either a paranoia or a political trick. There are no elected nations, nor ideal religions and teachings, nor perfect political systems.

Christianity also has many week points ("Trinity"; Jesus the-God-Man or Messiah-Superman; universal all-embracing undiscriminating love; non-motivated all-forgiveness, etc.) which makes it ineffective, non-practical, often risky...

Any religions built on the idea of sacrificing someone (or something), on the cult of sacrifice, are rather ephemeral, not compatible with reality...

The most important and actual commandment for humankind is not *DEUS IMITARI*, which is impossible, but *ANIMAL NON IMITARI*.

From experience, we may come to the conclusion: there is Churchianity instead of "Christianity", and moreover, there is no "Christianity" as such, but properly JudeoChristianity of various traditions (Byzantinian, Roman, Lutheran, Kalvinist etc.). Christianity is a subsystem, variation of Judaism, Islam also used basic Jewish historical frameworks and legends....

Any religion built on the **cult** of a sacred Book, a Temple, Holy Land, Holy Nation, ritual utensils, Holy Days, sacred Language, icons, saints, clergy authorities, may easily become an opium, an illusion. If a Teaching is in conflict with Natural/ Cosmic Laws, those conflicting aspects are to be ignored/rejected by us.

Ultimate aim and meaning of any religion is self-control, self-regulation, strengthening of human spirit and will - not detachment, escapism, withdrawal from the world into monkery, mysticism, occultism, hypnotizing phantasmagoria, hiding into sects and monasteries.

The main goal of a due religion is to educate people in the sense that the man, unlike animals, must control himself and be responsible for his actions...

Religion must be an Instrument serving to secure man's spiritual protection and self-improvement, but never enslave him, drive him into a deadlock by suppressing his reason and development.

After 2000 years of propaganda and domination, the proclaimed Covenant of some tribal Deity with a "chosen people" has crumbled as an irrelevant myth/fable, when humanity began to guess that there's

neither Christianity and Judaism, nor Islam, but a *common* Biblical/ Noahide/ Avraamic/ Mosaic religion grown of the same Middle Eastern roots and design...

Unfortunately, there is no perfect System or Method, “no direct path to Truth” (J.Krishnamurti), and **no monopoly** of any religion... Any religion may present a PART of Truth, but hardly the WHOLE Truth…

By the way, historically, the Bible (originally the Torah), has never been an *authentic source* - rather, a sort of science fiction, legendary chronicles, partially borrowed myths and traditions...

In fact, all religions are kinds of *sects* that interpret in their own way the relationship between the man and the Universe or Nature, various manifestations of ONE COSMIC SPIRIT. Problems arise when different interpretations lead to mutual enmity and conflicts...
Truth is One and the same for all, only expressed in different forms, reflected in different ways - while the paths to It are different for everyone...

As Thomas Paine put it, "Practical religion consists in doing good. The only way of serving God is that of endeavoring to make His creation happy..."

When ancient priest Hillel was asked about the essence of the Torah (Mosaic teaching), he answered: “What is hateful to you, do not do to others, all the rest is a commentary”.

Earlier, Confucius taught the same idea: “Don't do to others what you don't want for yourself... Respect every person as yourself, and treat him as we would like to be treated...”

In addition to all the above, one thing should be taken into account as well:

There’s a big difference between the direct teaching of Zarathushtra and what the priests invented after him - Zoroastrianism, between what Buddha taught and what Buddhist monks invented later - Buddhism, the same with other religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc...

We may respect different religions and branches of knowledge, yet not be limited to them...

All religious commandments and rituals can only be of a *recommendatory* / advisory nature...

Living literally/ **blindly** by religious instructions written for a specific group of people 2000 years ago, is inadequate in the real life of society and can only create problems for the followers of that faith themselves and for the surrounding population groups...

So let’s study useful **relevant** ideas, test their effect/impact on ourselves, how valuable they may be for our lives, avoiding unnecessary dogmas and superficial ritualism...

Amen.

CONCLUSIVE AFTERWORD

According to a religious logic, when the Messianic Age arrives, all the ancient teachings will be radically revised...

- Here is a probable answer to humanity's 5000-year-old existential question :

"God" is REALITY in all its manifestations, all diversity, with all its laws, its charms and threats, all its positive and negative properties . . . " *I am what I am* " ...

- Traditional religions teach us not to do so and so to others, and to treat others in a certain way. Unfortunately, not all of humanity follows that algorithm. A more correct / adequate principle of behavior should be rather as follows :

Do unto others as they do unto you, treat others as they treat you, behave towards others as others behave towards you, with reciprocity, *fairly* ... And don't turn the other cheek to the one who hits you . . .

That might be the first and the last, universal Commandment...

[references: Exodus 21:23-25, Leviticus 24:17-22, Deuteronomy 19:21 ; Quran 2:194]

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26 November 1995

Mr. Sergei Kis
117 313 Russia
Moscow V-313 a/j 22

Dearest Sergei:

I have just this minute finished your long-awaited manuscript **First Approaches to Religion While Standing on One Foot....Difficult Issues in a Layman's View**, and want to respond immediately.

First, and most importantly, I so very much want to thank you for sharing it with me. Quite obviously, you have thought long and hard about the issues which your raise--all of which are reflected throughtout your writing.

Secondly, and of less importance, I do want to thank you for including my own thoughts and words in your own thinking and writing. It seems to me that we two share many of the same ideas, and I, for one , am glad.

Third, as I reflect upon your writing, one thing shines through out to me,is your call for three very different but nonetheless essential dialogues and conversations:

[1] Between Jews and Christians, together , searching for a common middle ground, if not now then, perhaps, in the future. So much needs to be overcome, that this may very well be the most difficult of all such dialogues. But for the sake of our common communities , we must try.

[2] Between humanity and God. Equally a difficult dialogue, bound as we have been for far too long by our historical understandings and preconceptions. If such a dialogue is, indeed, possible, then must we not think anew about these things, as you have evidently done and written?

[3] Between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Judaism. Here, too, the path is a difficult one. Those who claim full possession of the truth have seemingly little need of the rest of us. And those who wish to engage in such dialogues are all-too-often shouted down by others. The kind of dynamic and honest Judaism about which you write is in so very many ways the very opposite of the

kind of Judaism presented by the Orthodox, both Hasidic and non-Hasidic. But here, too, as above, we must try.

I do hope you have been able to send copies to others for their reading and responses. What are your plans for your manuscript now that it is finished? One thought: Perhaps it could be the first part of a book, published by Hineni Congregation and the World Union for Progressive Judaism??? The second part could then be the responses of those people to whom you have sent copies. As far as I know, it would be unique. [The only other book which I can recall which follows a similar format is **The Sunflower** *by Simon Wiesenthal, though it's topic is very different.]*

Again, I congratulate you on this most important undertaking, and wish you continued success both now and in the future. With warmest good wishes and greetings from the House of Jacobs to the House of Kis ,

Shalom,